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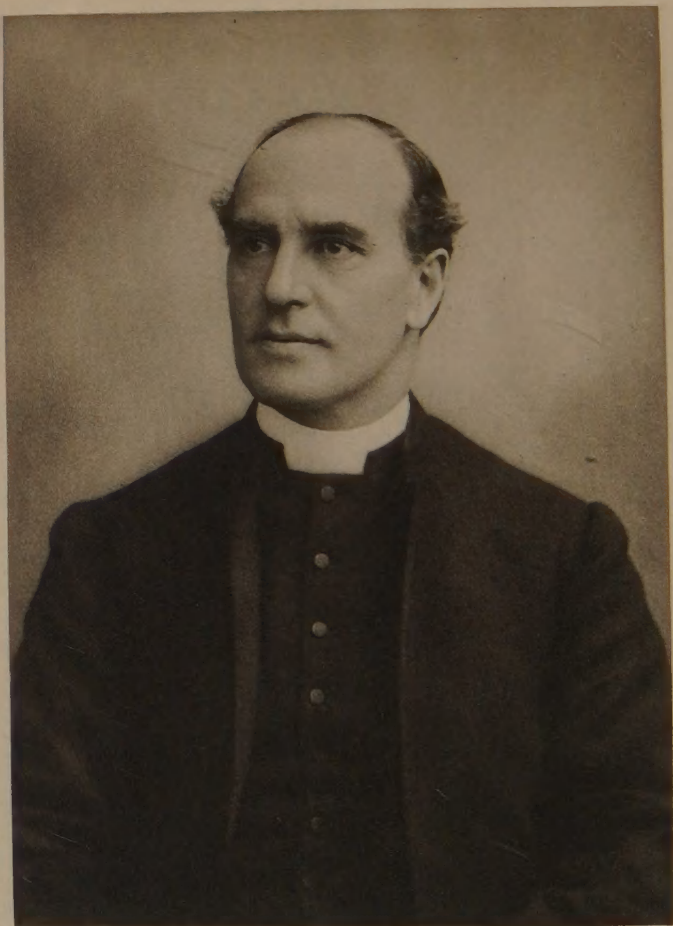
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NOW AND THEN

And Other Sermons

BY THE REV.

SPENCER JONES, M.A.

Author of

"England and the Holy See,"

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PREFACE

THE following sermons were delivered, in the first instance, extempore; that is, not, of course, without careful preparation beforehand, but without manuscript or notes of any kind at the time. They are various, because the circumstances were various under which they were preached.

The longer sermons, for instance, were preached either by themselves, Evensong having been said at another time, or else after Evensong; the shorter sermons were preached in the service of the Holy Eucharist; nor were they preached always to the same congregation, which again will account for any variation in style.

Where the asterisk appears (*) it is to mark a thought which had been so recently presented by some other mind that the recollection of its source was still fresh in my memory, and demanded, therefore, a special acknowledgment; the more general obligations of every preacher to a multitude of sources that he can no longer recall, trace, or analyse, still remain, of course, to be recorded.

SPENCER JONES.

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I

NOW—THE APPOINTED TIME

2

I

NOW—THE APPOINTED TIME

“Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”—PHIL. iii. 13-14

THE holy season of Advent is with us once again; and the Church’s call sounds out for all to hear it—the call to mark time and to mend our ways. “Now it is high time to awake out of sleep.” “Let us cast off the works of darkness”—now; “now in the time of this mortal life.”

We are sometimes tempted to resent this intrusion of the ecclesiastical into the civil year, as though it were calculated to confuse its outline. Why not fall into line with the rest of the world and make our beginning when every one else begins? Whereas if we say that one year begins on Advent Sunday

and another in January, we seem to take the edge off each without doing good to either.

But there is less confusion in this arrangement than at first appears, for Advent is not so much an event as the preparation for an event; it does not mark the coming of Christ itself so much as the preparation for that coming; while, on the other hand, the actual festival of Christmas, appearing as it does on the very threshold of the civil year, may be said to coincide with its beginning—Christ our Saviour standing and knocking at the very door of the new year in order that He may enter in and dwell there.

On the other hand, so far as the two ways of viewing time seem to stand apart, the successive seasons of the ecclesiastical running in parallel lines with those of the civil year, may they not be said to supply the latter with a conscience, to provide it with a corrective, and to remind us as we glance from the one to the other that the life we actually lead is one thing, whereas the life we ought to lead is too often another?

Meantime, the beginning of the one year and the end of the other find their meeting-point, and provide us with a pause in the present season, and the old and new are seen to blend.

Thus the season of Advent is a time of waiting: the signal goes down, the bell rings, the train is slowing down into the station, and we bring our luggage to the front for our new journey; and to know how to mark this time, to be able so to remember and so also to forget those things which are behind as to be able to reach forth unto those things that are before; to learn so well from our experience as never to surrender our hope; rightly to appreciate this blend of the days that are passing from us, and of those that are coming in their place, is to have sounded the significance and discovered the virtue of that little word "Now," and of that critical moment which we call "To-day."

I

I sometimes wonder how it would be without this light and shade—this succession of seasons, each one with a message of its own; those epochs, or turning-points, with their opportunities for consideration and change; how it would be if the aspect of nature were always one vague, dim, and dreary drab, and life itself one long, dull monotone; if there were only the mechanical ticking of the uniform moments, and never

the striking of the various hours. We should be lulled, every one of us, I think, into one continuous, death-like calm, "sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber," and time itself would pass without arousing or awakening in us any response. But actual life is otherwise; Nature on her part developing herself in a succession of regular seasons, constantly changing her colour and dress, and revelling in her almost infinite variations; while the Christian year presents itself in a variety of shapes, spreading out, as in living characters, the whole page of the gospel, and the life of Him from whom it takes its name, and constituting that succession of acts and scenes which go to make up the drama of our redemption.

No: actual life is no dull monotone, unless we drug ourselves with drink and merely drift with the stream. On the contrary, we say it is the unexpected that always happens, and life, in fact, is full of events and surprises. The question, therefore, is not whether we are affected by the passage of time; not whether time exerts its influence upon us because it cannot do otherwise; but what we make of it and how we manage its minutes and "organise its hours"—in other words, we have to ask ourselves not how time sets its mark upon us, but how we mark time.

II

Now, in this connection we may distribute men broadly into two divisions, each having a tendency peculiar to itself. Some brood over the past, others dream into the future; some waste their lives in regrets over days that are gone for ever; others vaguely anticipate days that are never to come. Not, of course, that it is possible for any one to live merely in the past or simply in the future. We cannot continue to exist without hope, and memory must remain with us in some shape if we are to maintain our identity. But some men are so absorbed in their past as to mistake it for their future, and others are so absorbed in their future as to mistake it for their past. These are ever persuading themselves that they have been all along what they intend to be, and those cannot bring themselves to believe that to-morrow will be anything but a dull and mechanical repetition of yesterday.

One sees into the future as through a glass, and believes himself to be ever going forward; the other gazes into the future as into a mirror and always meets himself coming back. One aspires to be only what he has been because he surrenders hope; the other views what he has been in the light of what he hopes to be, and ignores experience.

The man of despondency seldom succeeds because he only expects failure, while the man of merely sanguine temperament often fails because he looks only for success.

There is some truth, of course, in both attitudes, each tendency serving to counteract the exaggerations of the other, and in the corporate life of the world outside us both habits of mind manifestly minister to the balance of power and to that condition of settlement which we call the State ; but within the more contracted life of the individual the balance is not so easily secured, and it is certain that whether from leaning too heavily upon the days that are gone, or too heavily upon those that are yet to come, many of us lose our hold upon the life that now is.

Every one who is in earnest learns this sooner or later—learns, that is, to exert his will and to set a limit to his wanderings, whether in a backward or forward direction, recognising that the stream of thought may overflow its banks on either side and, with the law of association to help it, carry us away and away into a remote and distant past, or transport us through the vague dreams of our fancy into a dim and distant future.

Thus Elijah, in a supreme moment of despondency, takes a day's journey into the wilderness, seats himself under a juniper-tree,

and prays for the end. Life with him has resolved itself into a mere melancholy past, and, since that past presents itself to him as a succession of failures, why go on with it?

"It is enough;" the prophets of the Lord have been slain, the altars thrown down, the children of Israel are in rebellion, and I am no better than my fathers.

"I am not better than my fathers," perhaps; but where is the justice of the inference, "Now take away my life"?

Here we have weak man daring to fix his fate, as though he knew his own end and the number of his days; as though times and seasons were in his own hands and not in the hands of God; and all this from having surrendered himself wholly to his past until that past in turn has reacted upon him and absorbed him quite.

No; it is not enough; the past is but a portion and that portion not wholly bad. But what we see depends upon where we stand, and from where he was standing the prophet could see no more; it was the old story, viewing things out of their true proportion, and so mistaking a part for the whole. It was the standpoint that was at fault: "What doest thou here, Elijah?" "Go forth and stand upon the mount before the Lord." Now say whether it is enough;

whether retrospect is everything, and prospect nothing; and whether looking back is after all the only outlook.

We see in all this how possible it is for the past to overwhelm us; how it betrayed Elijah into despondency first, and afterwards into a dangerous, brooding melancholy, resolving itself in the event almost into the sin of suicide—"Lord, now take away my life." On the contrary, it was more life that he wanted; and God comes to give life to the world, not to take it away; He comes that we may have life, and that we may have it more abundantly; and we must arise in answer to the angel's touch and partake of the angel's food, or the journey will be too great for us; we must eat of that bread which cometh down from heaven and giveth life unto the world; if we are to have this life it is on Him that we must feed and not on ourselves.

It is possible, we know, to look so long upon one object as to continue to see only that object wherever we look, the image not merely staying in the eye but obstructing it; and so the man of despondency broods over his sorrowful past until he sees that and only that when he turns his face towards the future.

On the other hand where there is a merely

sanguine mind the future may act upon it as an intoxicant, the subject often protesting that his body is warmer when in fact his temperature has gone down; and drinking in so deep a draught of the future as to become elevated in a false sense, he may mistake a trance for the truth, being so impressed by the vivid pictures of his own fancy as no longer to keep his foot upon fact. Viewing what he has been only in the unreal light of what he hopes to be, such an one is apt to see all his attempts exaggerated into triumphs; all his ideal aspirations into real acts. Feeling himself to be near his own conditions he easily persuades himself that such nearness must mean knowledge, whereas it is this very fact that precludes it; for with a half suspicion of his own failure and yet a whole desire for his own success he converts the argument employed by the Apostle to mitigate his sufferings into an attitude that is calculated to transform his sins; as if he would say, "I reckon that my sins at this present time—if, indeed, it is true that I have any—are not worthy to be compared with the saintliness that will some day, no doubt, be revealed in me."

No one will deny to St. Paul the merit of achievement, nor would it be easy to detect any want of balance in his course; indeed

few have so wondrously combined those aspects into which all human life must necessarily be distributed—the life of thought, of word, and of action. Numberless passages could be produced in proof of this, some of them manifestly the outcome of profound and continuous thought, most notably of all, perhaps, his first eleven chapters to the Romans, where he wondrously strains and stretches his argument until it reaches its climax (Rom. xii. 1); and yet, if you view him on another side, you wonder where any sustained thinking or exact writing can possibly edge itself in; for his journeyings have been frequent, and he has been in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by his own countrymen. On five several occasions he has received thirty-nine stripes at the hands of the Jews; he has been stoned once, and beaten with rods three times; three times he has suffered shipwreck; he has been in prison more frequently than most people; he has encountered dangers in all directions—in the wilderness, in the city, and in the sea; and he has known what it is to go without food and clothing; and besides all these things he has had the care, and felt the weight upon his shoulders, of all the Churches. He could have entertained us for many days with the story of his wanderings and adven-

tures, and left us wondering how a missionary who seemed to be ever on the move, preaching and planting the gospel of Jesus Christ all over the earth, could also achieve solid work as a theological thinker and provide the foundations of a Christian philosophy which should exercise the minds and educate the consciences of the many millions of men who were to come after him.

All this he achieved within the compass of a lifetime; and we are led to ask how he was enabled to do it, how far he allowed himself to look back into his past or forward into his future; how he managed his moments, and what view he took of time.

Certainly St. Paul was under no illusions: he knew what it was to examine his past and to find out his mistakes, and his sin in having persecuted the Church of God was ever before him. He could say, and could mean the words when he said them, that he was "less than the least," and "not meet to be called an apostle"; and the recollection of all this settled itself in his mind and remained latent and yet operative in his consciousness throughout. That portion of his past weighed and was intended to weigh upon him and to serve as a drag to hold him back and restrain him from the hurry that comes of presumption, and from the dangerous practice of making forced

marches into the future. But St. Paul never mistook this for the whole ; on the contrary, when he wanted the Corinthians to mind him he could select a series of splendid achievements and tell his own vivid story of various and terrible experiences. He knew, indeed, if it was a question of experience and achievement there were few, if any, who could match him ; and in one place, you will remember, he pours out his past in that great flood of rhetoric to which allusion has already been made : and it can scarcely be said that his past was nothing to him when he was able so easily to run back over it and call it to mind. When he had to speak of himself it was like the ebb and flow of the tide ; and where he felt himself expatiating on his achievements sooner or later the refrain would come in again. It was not as though he had attained or were already perfect—"I count not myself to have apprehended ;" and St. Paul could not have remembered that he had forgotten if he had entirely forgotten to remember. And yet he expressly declares that he forgets, and that it is a principle and habit of his life to forget those things which are behind ; not as though it were any lapse of memory but rather by a deliberate effort of the mind.

It was well enough from time to time to recall his failures and his achievements, and

he knew how to press both into his service where it was a question of getting on and making progress; but what he would not do was to surrender himself wholly to reflections on what had happened or on what might happen so as to lose himself in either.

In going back again over the past, or in attempting to penetrate the future, he knew there was a limit beyond which he must not pass, and a point of time when, by an effort of the will, the entire picture must be put aside and remembered no more—a point of time when he would have to face to the front and press on towards the mark.

There is a lesson for us here; for a habit of merely running back over the past may degenerate into a melancholy and dangerous amusement; it is a habit which will grow apace: and if indulged in too freely even develop into madness. For it is one symptom of insanity that the patient thinks of one thing, which suggests another, which in its turn suggests a third, and so on into an indefinite series, surrendering himself, and being sucked into it as into a vortex, with no power to regulate or control the energy of the mind; like a ship with no one at the helm, and with the sea sweeping it away whithersoever it will. But it was otherwise with St. Paul; if he looked back it was

because there was something he wanted to find, and when he had found it the looking was done with; he knew that besides the mere acts and scenes that will sometimes come back at our bidding, there are certain underlying principles which govern them, certain unchangeable laws which we must perforce obey; and the point was to burrow underneath the surface until he came upon these laws and took possession of them, carrying them forward with him into the future to serve as lights to lighten his darkness and to guide his footsteps into the way of peace.

This is where the value of self-examination comes in: the apostle ran over his past, made his observations, drew his inferences, and came to certain definite and fruitful conclusions. "I find, then, a law that, when I would do good evil is present with me;" that is, after observing myself closely, I find that at one and the same moment, the moment when I set myself to do right, my mind works in one direction and my flesh in another, and two incompatible efforts dispute the ground. The Apostle would be prepared for this phenomenon in future, and when the call came to act now he would beware of another voice tempting him away from action; and his remedy would be to look away from himself to Christ.

So, like a swimmer moving forward on his side, St. Paul put away his past with one hand and, in the very act of doing so, helped himself to slice through the water with the other, and to press on to the haven where he would be.

IV

It is plain, then, that we can never really recall the past or live in it again, although we can entertain it as an idea, and form to ourselves a picture of it; and it is equally plain that it must, to a great extent, be this picture that we are looking at when we attempt to gaze into the future; our fancy first feeding upon facts and then forcing them to the front, as though they were all to come over again. We release the type of yesterday that we may rearrange it for the purposes of to-morrow, and there is even a sense within the life of the individual in which history repeats itself.

But imagination, we must remember, is a dangerous instrument if we are not careful how we use it; and you must not think you are living in your past merely because you can picture it, nor because you think you can picture your future, must you suppose that you can command it; for, in fact, it is within the four corners of your own mind that

the entire transaction has to be worked out. When you exercise your fancy upon the future or the past, you may, after all, be only fancying yourself; and what has been remains what it is, and what is to be will be, whatever you may think of it, although you need not remain as you are if you know how to think of it.

Thus a principal key to a man's character is the way, and the extent to which, he exercises his judgment upon his own past; requiring it to yield up its secret and appropriating and assimilating that secret to himself. As he looks back he sees everything in its place, and allows himself to employ in his picture of the future only such colours as have endured and stood the test of time in the picture of the past.

On the eve of Waterloo it was necessary for Napoleon to warn his soldiers that they had forced marches in front of them—they knew what he meant, for they had experienced these before, and they must be on the lookout for them again; but that was only one side of the picture, and knowing that he had come up to a turning-point and a crisis, when a decisive victory must, if possible, be won, he selected two appropriate facts out of their past and brought them forward for his purpose, deliberately omitting and forgetting

other and uglier passages that were behind. "Soldiers!" he exclaimed, "this day is the anniversary of Marengo and of Friedland, which twice decided the destiny of Europe." This was the way to make their blood tingle and to fire their courage; this was a picture of their power at its best, and it was this picture that must go with them into the morrow. Waterloo was to be another Friedland or Marengo.

They failed, it is true, in the event, but it was not for want of courage, nor because they did not fight grandly, for they had a great reputation at their backs to support them, acts of bravery having accumulated and formed themselves into habits until they could appeal to a law which reacted upon them now just when they needed it most: "The Old Guard dies, but never surrenders." You see from this how all achievement tells, how you recover from the past what you put into it when it was present, and how experience provides you with capital which you must know how to invest for the future. It is this which makes the difference between one man and another; this, it is, which saves us from blundering on in the old ways and repeating the old mistakes; and it is in this way also that history comes to provide "an excellent cordial for drooping spirits."

The past, if we are not morbid in our use of it, will come again and again to our rescue ; serving, according to the angle at which we place it, as a weight to restrain us or as a support for us to fall back upon ; ministering, in either case, to our advance ; old duties coming up again without their old mistakes, and so imparting to each day a characteristic excellence of its own ; illustrating the principle of progress, and enabling us to mark and even to make time.

V

But perhaps it will be said that I am speaking of the past and of the future, whereas it is the present of which I ought to speak. And yet what do I mean by the present? We speak of eternity being mysterious, but is not time more so? Are we to picture each several moment as though it were a substantive thing by itself, and as though it paused on its way and made its bow and entered into definite relations with us before passing on? Is not the coming of every moment the beginning also of its going? It is a passing not a pausing moment, and no one can bring it to a standstill. I am older in every word that I utter than I was in the word before ; and who

is there who can stem the tide or stay the rush of this ever-rolling stream? Who is there who can detain and fasten the moments as they fly? Men speak of finding time; let them find it first and then may they talk of fixing it. Indeed, to attempt to find time is only to waste it, and to detach it from its context would be to lose it altogether. God's energy is at work everywhere; without us in Nature, and within us in the activity of our own souls, and the very clock that strikes is not the time itself, but a working machine that announces at certain intervals the amount of work it has done, conveying to us at the same time a hint about our own work, throwing us back upon ourselves and upon the question as to what use we are making of that power that worketh in us. The question is whether your work is keeping pace with other work so as to preserve a due proportion, and it is always a question of work, however various, and never of waiting.

Thus, whereas we are apt to fancy that time is something without us, we find that so far as it concerns ourselves at all the whole interest of it centres within; and the reason why one moment is never the same as the next is because of what God does or what He enables us to do in it. It is this view of time as providing us with opportunity that saves us

from the snare of delay ; this is why the same word "now," as applied to the successive moments of time never, in fact, signifies the same thing ; and this is also why "now," to whatever moment it may be applied, is ever the signal for action, and "to-day" always the very day for turning over a new leaf. For if every moment were but as every other I might as well wait for another moment as make my effort in this ; but since it is otherwise, since the character of the moment is but the mark we have made upon ourselves, and since the accumulated weight of the past is ever exerting its pressure upon the present, then delay may mean my own undoing ; for our acts are ever rolling themselves up into habits, and the older we grow the more difficult it is to change us.

Whether we look backwards or forwards, then, everything conspires to concentrate the interest of our actions upon the present, for we are confronted by the uncertainty of life when we look into the future, and by the certainty and ever-increasing weight of habit if we look back into the past. And yet it is precisely here that we fail ; to the multitude of men the incidents of everyday life are so ordinary and commonplace that they are apt to push their way past them or to toss them aside like a careless servant attempting to

tidy a room without knowing the value of what he touches.

Time should be regarded not as comprising a series of distinct and isolated moments, but rather as a whole in which each part bears a definite relation to the rest, as a picture in which a slight touch often alters the whole expression; or as a body in which no one member can suffer without the other members suffering with it; but men do not view it so, but rather pull it in pieces and play with it, and so fail to appreciate the moments as they pass. Time, in their eyes, has no course or character of its own; they do not recognise in it any shape or proportion, persuading themselves to regard it as a mere going on without any gathering of force, whether for good or evil, as it goes.

This is why some protest that they do not know what to do with their time, and others that they have not enough of it. The school-boy intends to exert himself presently, forgetting that he can command only the moment that now is, and that the success of to-morrow depends upon the work he is doing to-day.

The man of mature age does not appreciate his maturity, nor see how impossible it will be to achieve later on the work that he should be doing now. And the bulk of mankind are too

apt to mistake the passing for a permanent state, to assume that because they are here to-day they will therefore be here to-morrow ; that because they desire to turn and repent to-day that desire will be equally with them to-morrow, or that because they have failed to-day there is nothing but failure before them in the future, mistaking, like Elijah of old, the dreary spot of their own choosing for the whole wide world, or a mere mood of the moment for the total sum of life.

We say, one day is as good as another, and that on some day or other we shall turn to God ; but Scripture says that evil days are coming when we shall have no care for these things and that we should remember our Creator now. Scripture says the virgins are foolish because they expect to have their oil now, although they would not fetch it then ; and yet we buy no oil to-day and still hope to have our oil to-morrow ; and how impressive is the spectacle of our Saviour standing and weeping over Jerusalem because she knew not the time of her visitation ! Time has a character and a course of its own, but you do not appreciate this if you isolate its moments and view them apart. The first moment of David's sin was pregnant with an awful future, and yet to

him no doubt it was merely a look ; later on came the sin of adultery, and after that the plan for Uriah's death.

These successive acts occupied, perhaps, three several days, but will any one say that the days were all the same—a mere dull monotone of reiteration, and not the successive stages of an awful crime? Had the look no connection with the subsequent letter, and the letter itself no bearing upon the soldier's death?

There is a proportion in things, but men do not see this ; they see that one thing is less than another, but they do not see that one thing leads to another. Their life, they say, is dull because it is full of little things. What can be more ordinary or commonplace—how difficult to invest all this with romance or interest of any kind ! I am to rise, you say, betimes ; to say the “Our Father” and my other prayers with a pure intention ; to read a few verses and to meditate thereon. Next, I find myself in the society of others, and I am to have my eye upon all my guests, to listen when they speak and not to assert myself ; to check the angry thought and to withhold the unkind word ; to be on my guard against gossip, and to restrain my appetite. All this is here and now, but where is the romance or heroism of it? Where is

there any scope for distinction? Can this be actual life itself? Is it not rather a time to be got through—a resting on our oars until some great wave of life shall overtake and sensibly lift us and bear us forward on its breast?

You will say, then, that I am trifling with you if I complete this catalogue of routine, and as you grow impatient at the bare enumeration of such commonplace duties, so will you fret when you find yourself in front of them. You read perhaps some stirring account of a battle and of the genius of a great general, and lose yourself in it until you almost merge your own identity in his. "Here," you exclaim, "is greatness indeed!" and then you complain that you have to return to your dull routine, where there is no scope for your powers, and no opportunity for making a mark upon the age in which you live. Or, perhaps you appreciate the value of routine, and pride yourself on your method, but then you protest that you can never follow it out. It is not your fault: your plans are made, and perhaps you start well, but interruptions begin at once—a knock at the door, a note that requires an immediate answer, a message from a friend begging that you will see him for a moment—all slight things, perhaps, you will say, but fretting and worrying

nevertheless. And at the end of the day what have you to show for it? Your time has been frittered away in trifles, and you yourself are vexed. Moreover, in your case all this is a trial of a very special kind, because it is a principle with you that unless you can do a thing well you would rather not do it at all.

So it is that we come to postpone our actual duties in favour of a dim and shadowy ideal, straining our eyes in order to discern it in the future, and waking up at length, only too late, perhaps, to find that we have been aiming at no substantial thing after all, but only at some "empty shadow of our own mind's throwing."

How pathetic it is that we should be ever following this mere phantom of time instead of recognising and entertaining its opportunities one by one; that instead of smiting upon our own breasts and setting to work upon ourselves we should be ever beating the air in our attempt to strike at something else! How pathetic that we should fancy ourselves to be entering into life at the very moment and in the very act of our running away from it, "Never being, but always to be blessed."

"Not now" is our constant refrain when our Saviour stands and knocks; or more

often, perhaps, it is, "Presently," which means, "Not just now."

And yet—

"Lord, what am I that, with unceasing care,
Thou didst seek after me,—that Thou didst wait
Wet with unhealthy dews, before my gate,
And pass the gloomy nights of winter there?
O, strange delusion!—that I did not greet
Thy blest approach.

* * * * *

How oft my guardian angel gently cried,
'Soul, from thy casement look, and thou shalt see
How He persists to knock and wait for thee.'
And oh! how often to that voice of sorrow
'To-morrow we will open,' I replied,
And when the morrow came I answered still,
'To-morrow.'"

Forgetting that all great acts are preceded by an almost infinite series of little acts, that we can only expect to reap what we have sown, and that we cannot hope for anything to turn out where nothing has been put in. We are ever longing for excitement, and are proportionately depressed because it does not and cannot always come; not devoting any time to preparation, and yet craving in every successive movement of time for an event. What a little thing it is, what an easy thing it must be to act here and now! So at least we fancy until experience inflicts upon us the

rude shock of fact ; for it is the very ease and littleness of what we have to do that betrays us, and, despising the day of small things, we dream and dream again of a future that is never to be ours.

VI

How, then, are we to solve this problem of time, and to discover the secret and virtue of this little word "Now"? How shall we meet the Church's challenge at this season of Advent, and cast off the works of darkness now—"now in the time of this mortal life"? Where is the sovereign remedy for our inveterate habit of inattention, our habit of despising all that now is in favour of all that may be ; our tendency to conceive a kind of vulgar contempt for what lies near us and about us, and to assume that greatness is always to be looked for then, but never to be realised now. The Jews could not explain our Lord. "What wisdom is this?" "Is not this the carpenter . . . Are not His sisters with us?" And by the general multitude of men the Saviour of the world "was despised; and we esteemed Him not." What superficial familiarity! What foolish and ignorant contempt! We have heard of one who though unversed in the law presumed to pose as an

authority on all legal questions merely because the Lord Chancellor passed down his street every day. And so with ourselves we are too apt to mistake nearness for knowledge, and to assume that we have sucked all the virtue out of our everyday routine merely because it has been "here with us" so long, and to overlook, slur over, or neglect the occasion God provides in our very home itself, as we do the prophet who is without honour merely because "he is in his own country, and among his own kin and in his own house."

Some people are born into the world with long sight, that is, with power to rest their eyes easily upon distant objects, but without the power to compress them and to bring them down to the focus of what is near. So it may be, so it often is, with the eyes of our understanding, and Scripture is full of warnings against the danger of not seeing what lies at our feet, and of always looking ahead for our opportunity.

In attempting to meet this difficulty, then, and in order to gather up the threads of my argument I will venture to put forward one or two considerations.

1. And first, we must shift the centre of interest from time, which is but a phantom, to our Saviour Himself, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning, to

Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever ; to Him who gives His name to the year in order that it may variously illustrate His own life and character.

Remember that religion has to do with Persons in the first place, and only in the second place with things ; and that as a branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, so things of whatever kind are without life apart from the love of God ; and it makes all the difference in the world whether we regard things as ends or whether we recognise them as opportunities. Dealing with things is not the same as dealing with persons ; this is what strikes us in the writings of the Old Testament, the way God's people see through mere secondary causes to Him who is the Cause of all ; and while it is convenient for other sciences to stop short, for the time being, at secondary causes, it is the province of theology to insist upon the First Cause, to bring His Presence to the front, and to remind us at every turn that we are dealing in all we do with Him. Remember, I am attempting to answer the question, why we overlook the duty of the present moment, and why it is that we put in the plea, "not now," when that duty presents itself. The Stoic of old solved the difficulty by setting his face like a flint and doing what he believed to

be right—at all costs; and that was noble, for it was all he knew, but it was without a heart and cold as the grave. The gospel, on the other hand, while it also bids us do our duty, provides us with a motive to warm our hearts and make what is hardest seem quite light. We are to take up our cross, certainly; but it is in order to come after our Saviour; and His appeal to us is not merely to “Keep His commandments,” but “If ye love Me keep My commandments.” And so closely has He identified Himself everywhere with us that an act which is not directed towards Him is not to be accounted a religious act at all; while on the other hand every good action we do to others He is graciously pleased to construe as an act of goodness done to Himself.

This is important. The deliberate operations of the natural body emanate from and are directed by the head, and we have no difficulty in realising this, whatever secondary causes and motives may intervene; so must we learn to regard the operations of the mystical body, recognising our Saviour in the person of His servants and directing our ministrations to Him when we are called upon to minister to them.

The presence of God with His Church is the governing thought throughout: we are not

getting through a series of situations in order that we may arrive at Him, but we are conversing with Him from the outset, one hand resting in His while we work with the other. And this will help us to meet and to interpret what we dare to denounce as our vexing interruptions, warning us that if we insist upon setting up the type without reference to God we must not be surprised if He steps in to correct it; that our little programmes are but contributions that must be submitted to be received up into a context higher and greater than themselves; and that the Agony in the Garden is ever reproducing and multiplying itself in the daily, hourly, and momentary efforts we are making to do the right. Are we to drink the cup, or is it to pass from us? These contradictory attitudes and actions cannot both survive within one and the same moment. One or other of them must give way; let us pray that we may not be tempted to exercise our own fastidious judgments in this choice, but submit ourselves rather to the judgment of God.

Let us ever be ready to go forth and meet the Bridegroom when He calls, or, as one of the old monks used to have it, let us be ready to leave Jesus for Jesus.

Dear brethren, the love of God is the only motive adequate to this end.

2. And our second consideration, which will be found to grow out of the first, is the duty we owe to little things; the difficulty of bearing in mind that "perfection depends upon infinitesimals," and that "a little thing is a very little thing, but faithfulness in little things is a very great thing."

Love is the key to the position here again: for love is ever delicate in its attentions; and while a true lover may be absent-minded towards others, he is all attention and ever on the alert towards the object of his love. Never forget it; it is prisoners who speak of "serving their time"; the privilege of sons is to serve God.

3. And a further consideration is that God is a God of order, that order implies proportion, that as creatures of progress we can only appreciate the significance of our immediate duties by seeing them in their setting, and that it is "he that is faithful in that which is least who is faithful also in much."

4. And lastly, another serious hindrance to our acting now may be the dread or even likelihood of failure. Thus the true function of failure, the fact that over and beyond what we do, whether we succeed in it or no, is the way, the spirit, the temper in which we do it, and the effect it has upon ourselves when it has had time to react on our spirits—this is a

last consideration which, like the rest, finds its solution in our relation to a Person, in the fact of our probation—in a word, in the discipline of Divine love.

Thus a deeper love towards God is the ultimate solution of all our difficulties.

Not because it is a little thing or a great thing we have to do now ; not because it is to issue in failure or end in success : not even because it presents itself now—none of these is the right reason for taking it instantly in hand and treating it ; but because it comes to us from the good and loving hand of our God.

Yes, the secret of life is here. “Now” is the little thing of time ; do not stumble at this little thing, but learn rather to love it, and to embrace this opportunity, not to pass it by. Is it not easier after all to spell our long words a syllable at a time ? Is it not easier to walk with God a day at a time, while it is called “To-day” and “Now ?”

Love, then, this little thing : be not offended at it ; treat it not with contempt, but deem it precious, grasp it with a firm hand, draw it close to your heart, and press it to your lips for Christ your Saviour’s sake.

II

THE SOUL

II

THE SOUL

“For what is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”—MATT. xvi. 26.

MEN sometimes say it is selfish to think of your soul, but our Saviour did not say so. On the contrary, a man's soul, He said, was his first concern, and there was nothing he could give in exchange for it.

The challenge is the more impressive because He leaves us to answer it for ourselves, as He did also on another occasion when speaking of the faith, “When the Son of Man cometh shall He find faith on the earth?”

So in the present instance He leaves us face to face with the supreme question, “What must I do to be saved?”

And if no doctrine of our Saviour's can be a selfish doctrine we must learn how to refute

the charge of selfishness that is often brought against this view of the soul and to explain the attitude of those who seek to avoid the subject as such or prefer the word "service" to the word "salvation," and identify in their own minds the sum and substance of religion with a life in which we are ever doing something for others and taking no thought for ourselves. To such minds the language we often hear about the soul and its salvation is abhorrent and seems to savour only of cant and unreality ; and instead of reflecting that the abuse of that which is highest must ever be the worst, and that no abuse can take away the use, they let the doctrine go and let themselves go with it, only substituting in the end perhaps a new phrase of their own for the phrase they have discarded and a new abuse for the abuse they have sought to remove.

If, then, the question of the soul constitutes the chief subject of our Saviour's system, and if, nevertheless, so august a doctrine has been deliberately put on one side or allowed to drop out, it may be well to ask how this has come to be, to expose the fallacy that lies at the root of such reasoning, and to do what we can towards restoring the doctrine itself to its proper place within the context of Christian teaching.

And, first, let us review the character of our Lord's work as such—that is, as a question of fact and not of faith, putting away from our minds for the moment all considerations of doctrine or of the dignity of His Person, and regarding Him merely as a wondrous phenomenon of history; viewing Him, that is, as all men everywhere must view Him, and this in order to discover some secrets of His success.

For we must not say that because His work was Divine it was therefore done anyhow; on the contrary, since order and method are Heaven's first law, we shall look in our Saviour's case for their most perfect and sublime illustrations. Think, then, once again of what He did and of some of the principles on which He did it; for if He pursued a certain order and presented His message to us in a particular shape, whereas we, on our part, are presuming to reverse that shape and to neglect that order, we must no longer be surprised by our own failures nor expect our message to command the attention of our fellow-men.

I

See, then, what it is that our Saviour has done—the mark He has made upon the world

and the revolution He has produced within it. We live now "in the year of our Lord"—that is, throughout the civilised world the years are named after Him now, as if time itself had started once again.

Being Himself "the mightiest among the holy, and the holiest among the mighty, He lifted with His pierced hands empires off their hinges, turned back the stream of centuries in its channel, and still governs the ages."

This is allowed on all hands and written on the face of history. Furthermore, it is a fact also that He did what He did without any adventitious aid. Glance at the map and see what a small and despised country He came from and in what a despised place He passed the greater portion of His days. Can any wondrous phenomenon appear in Palestine? Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?

While as regards length of time, how strange it is to reflect that His ministerial life—that life of temptation and teaching, of preaching and of miracle—was all compressed within the compass of some two or three years! There, within that narrow space of time, we recognise the pivot on which the whole mighty revolution was made to turn.

Seek out the greatest personage of the present moment, challenge him to do a similar work, and give him three years to

do it in, and you will soon come to appreciate the magnitude of our Lord's undertaking.

We should say of our own King, perhaps, that he has already done great things despite the fact that he has only lately come to the throne; but the work of the King of kings was begun, continued, and ended within a shorter space of time than that which separates us from Queen Victoria.

And with so short a time before Him our Lord could have no opportunity for experiments, for doing a thing one moment and perhaps undoing it the next, or for unsaying on one day what had been said the day before. There was no time in so short a sojourn for hesitation and delay, and when we add to this that absence of all haste and hurry which is a conspicuous feature in our Lord's work He must have known at once what should come first and what second, and which doctrine of all others to set in the forefront of His teaching. Here, then, is our Saviour as we see Him on His human side: He starts with everything against Him; there is neither dignity of place nor measure of time, nor even special beauty of form in His favour; He is at cross-purposes with the religious society of His day; He makes enemies wherever He goes; He abstains from advertisement, and even enjoins silence upon His

followers as to what their own eyes have seen; and when He comes to His great sermon He commences it not with words of flattery, as we should have done, perhaps, in order to win our way, but rather by bidding men think less of themselves; and so far from cultivating the acquaintance of the men of influence about Him, His attack upon them is so vigorous and precise as to betray Him at length into their hands and to nail Him to the cross of Calvary.

No doubt the wise men of the moment had their own explanation for all this: He had gone to work in the wrong way from the first; He must have known that to announce a kingdom of His own within the Roman Empire was inevitably to excite opposition at the outset and to ensure failure and death in the event; He had brought Himself into conflict with the authorities and, in fact, with all the most considerable people of His time; and this was what had come of it. His had been an interesting figure, no doubt; but how much longer might He have lived and what a great work He might have done had He only been wise in His generation! And how plausible such talk as this would sound at the moment of His death; there, before the eyes of men, was the outward visible sign of His failure!

Such was the actual phenomenon of our Lord's manifestation as it must have appeared at the moment; and yet, dear brethren, our Lord was right after all and the world was wrong, as the subsequent verdict of history has testified; and all this apart from any question of doctrine. Now a success of this magnitude could not have been the work of an accident, the outcome and concurrence of happy circumstances; on the contrary, in spite of appearances which, as men would say, were manifestly against Him, He fore-saw and proclaimed His ultimate triumph as plainly as He did His own death; that while the seed that He was planting would have to die, nevertheless its own intrinsic nature was such, and the time for planting it so opportune that nothing would be able to withstand it in the end. Must there not have been profound science and consummate art at the back of this, so to convert what seemed so huge a blunder into so wondrous an achievement! With what skill must He have selected His instruments, and with what precision must He have wielded them! What, then, was the history of this process, what the order of its unfolding, and what the secret of its success? What we see here must surely be the unfolding of a perfect plan, in which every movement is subordi-

nated to one supreme and governing idea ; the enterprise as a whole, and the proportion of its several parts being luminously evident to our Lord's mind from the outset. Is not this the secret of every great work, especially where it is a work of much complexity, and the time for doing it is short ?

Method becomes the more necessary in proportion as the available moments are few ; not the mere number of things determining their value, nor the fact that each is a wondrous thing in itself ; but rather the way they are put together and presented as a whole.

Not merely how to procure material but how also to secure proportion is the anxious question in every enterprise ; and we do not say, in the case of music, that it is the notes as such, nor even the composition of the notes, that produces the desired effect, but rather the marks of expression, and how they are observed, and where it is precisely that we place the emphasis. Nor again, with the human countenance, do we say that a face is beautiful merely because every feature in it is beautiful, but because of the due relation of each distinct feature to all the rest.

And if this is so with the several aspects of life, so must it be also with life itself as a whole and with the gospel of life : God saw

everything that He had made at the outset, and behold it was very good ; nevertheless He made the sun to rule the day, and the moon and stars to govern the night.

And so in His work of redemption : select any one of its features, play any one of its notes, and it is beautiful, and has a beauteous sound—any utterance, any miracle, any event whatsoever, it is grand and glorious in every part of it. Certainly, but what is it that makes it glorious as a whole ? Every several part may be good, and yet some parts may be more important than others ; it must have a secret of its own and a progress like every other work ; and there must be a definite relation between the parts.

Think of this in our Saviour's work : the solemn emphasis and the marks of expression, the stately and significant proportion of its parts.

And as such proportion implies and requires a certain way of viewing things and of approaching the work of life, our Lord in associating His disciples with His enterprise labours to bring them into line with Himself and to make them look out upon the world with His eyes, and see things as He sees them.

He finds them fastening their attention upon means as though they were ends, and

upon outsides as though they were the very heart and substance of the thing, and He sets Himself to awaken in their minds a sense of proportion.

One of His most impressive object lessons for this purpose is the sect of the Pharisees: no class of men are so vigorously attacked by our Saviour; and yet if you look at what they did and not at the drift of what they were doing, each several thing was good; it was good to fast twice in the week, it was good to give tithes of all they possessed, it was good to be careful with their ceremonial, and to give themselves to prayer. And yet all this was bad when put together, and that because of the way they put it; the Pharisees failed in proportion. And so again men were not to think too much of their clothing, or too much of their food, or too much of this present world as a whole; for after all a man's body is more important than what he clothes it with, and what he is is more important than what he eats.

"Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?" You see, there was a regular proportion in things, and men were not so much to fear those who could only kill the body but rather to fear Him who could destroy both body and soul in hell.

The kingdom of heaven was to come first,

and other things afterwards. Not the clothing, for that is without us, not the body, although that is nearer to the centre, but the soul or spiritual self is what occupies our Lord.

The human soul as such is what He everywhere sees before Him, the transcendent value of the soul is what He never allows Himself to forget, and for the human soul as such He lived and died on this earth.

Remove this object and purpose, and the entire New Testament goes with it; for as it was the work of St. Joseph's life to be a carpenter, so was it our Lord's occupation to save souls: "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners."

II

How, then, has this doctrine come to fall into discredit or been allowed to drop out? This, I think depends upon the question as to what we mean by the soul, and what is meant when we speak of saving it. Twenty years ago it was the fashion with some, who were not always in sympathy with the gospel, to propose the first of these questions as a kind of puzzle as if it must itself be unanswerable unless we could find a precise answer to it.

One distinguished professor of physical science especially was wont to complain that men were apt to speak of the soul as if it were something a man carried about with him under his hat; and during the brief reign of a false materialism a puzzle like this too often proved itself perplexing; until at length men almost persuaded themselves that the soul could have no existence unless we could say precisely what it was.

A bold surprise at a belief, it has been well said, is often made to do duty for an argument against it, and, "Pray what do you mean by the soul?" is interpreted to signify, "You must mean nothing at all, unless you can say here and now what it is that you mean."

And yet the fact that I cannot say what the soul is constitutes no argument whatsoever against its existence: my consciousness and what it reports to me being one thing, and my power or want of power to analyse it, another; just as I may know myself to be out of health and in pain without being able to say what is the matter with me; and I may be ill without knowing what it is that ails me.

So with the soul: men have speculated, in all ages of the world, as to what it is; identifying it sometimes with the blood about the

heart, sometimes with the nature of limbs, or sometimes supposing it to be hidden away in some corner of the brain ; but the soul itself does not disappear with the disappearance of our inadequate speculations about it ; and it is enough if we understand that a man's soul signifies a man's self in that aspect of him which endures as contrasted with that other aspect which manifestly passes away.

Because the several particles of my body change, every one of them, again and again, I do not, therefore, sacrifice at intervals the property that has been left to me in the meantime ; nor do I necessarily write my will over again, nor turn to the font, again and again, for baptism.

But if the mystery of the soul has no bearing as such upon its existence, any more than life's mystery as a whole serves to destroy the reality of life as a fact, nevertheless it does suggest a rebuke to those who speak in a familiar strain of that about which they know so little, bringing into contempt thereby a subject so sacred as a man's personal and spiritual self.

Apart from such a warning, however, difficulties as to the nature of the soul need not detain us ; but it is otherwise with the charge that to be chiefly concerned with our personal selves is the attitude necessarily of selfish

persons ; and I will go on to speak more particularly of this, and to show that the charge itself is based upon a misunderstanding.

III

It is plain, to begin with, that the soul, in every case, is the absolute property of Him who made it, and that, in desiring to benefit the world, we are not at liberty to discharge ourselves recklessly upon society, and to make a present to others of what does not belong to ourselves ; our own self-respect being not the contradiction but rather the complement of the respect we owe to others ; and the love we have for ourselves as well as the love we bear to our neighbour being the necessary outcome of the love that we should all of us have towards God.

In things of this world it makes a difference whether an object belongs to us or not. "Be careful how you handle this," we say, "it is not mine ;" "That is my own, and I do not so much care what you do with it."

Suppose you were living on an estate which you believed to be your own, and you had grown used to it, and had done what you would with it for years, and then suppose you were suddenly told that it was not your own at all, but that it belonged to another, it

would produce a shock at first, and you would step out on to the lawn and tread the several paths, and look about you and find everything strange. "So this is not mine," you would say, "after all;" and would handle everything carefully then, as remembering that you were responsible to the owner for the use of it.

So with the soul—and this is the first step in conversion—it is when we attentively consider ourselves that we are led on to the consideration of God. We are so used to being with ourselves that the very familiarity breeds contempt, until we come to flatter ourselves that we are our own to do what we will with. And yet, if you put your books away from you for a moment and look at yourself, how strange it all is! Trace the finger of one hand over the surface of the other and say how much you know; the skin, the nervous system, the bones, how much do you know of these? How much do you know of the functions of your several organs? How much about the laws and the working of your own mind? Where is the junction or mysterious meeting-point between the will and the members? No, you must look elsewhere for a knowledge of these, and you are manifestly not your own. So with the prodigal son, it was when he came to himself that he said, "I will arise, and go to my Father."

And next, although no man belongs to himself, it is plain that a man is related to his own soul in a sense in which he cannot be related to another; Almighty God having been pleased, with a view to its salvation, to distinguish and protect the individuality of each soul by investing it with a consciousness of itself. Such, so far, is the constitution of the soul, and such God's way of saving it, every one in the world having a general concern in the soul wheresoever it may be, and the individual as such having a more particular concern in himself.

I am with myself at all times, even when I am not conscious of myself; and, although such obvious and intermittent contact as I may have with others does not give the measure of my influence over them, nevertheless such contact and even such influence is for the most part superficial, and, therefore, insecure; so that, while the consciousness I have of myself is intimate, my consciousness of them must ever be more remote. I am not forgetting that my own individuality is realised by entering into the social life around me, and not by abstaining from it; nor am I forgetting that the social life around me provides a field for the exercise and development of my powers, and so, for the salvation of my soul, nevertheless the truth remains that,

whereas it is an effort for my soul to go out towards my neighbour, it is natural and inevitable for my soul to fall back upon itself. If, then, our first consideration must be the relation of the soul as such to God, the consideration which comes next is, the means God has been pleased to adopt in order to save it; and this we have seen, so far, to consist in a certain definite relation of each soul to itself, which is known as self-consciousness, and that more remote relation of one soul to another, which is one of the conditions of its life.

Nor must the consciousness of this relation be confused with the sin of selfishness; for selfishness is an abuse of power, consisting, as it does, in ignoring and attempting to escape our proper limitations, and to centre wholly and solely around ourselves. The very aim of selfishness is separation; separation from our Maker as well as from our fellow-men, and this cannot mean our salvation, inasmuch as separation from God is sin, and the wages of sin is death. No; such abuse of power is one thing, whereas the attempt to appraise ourselves justly is another.

Moreover, the experiment of isolating the soul has been attempted with results that might have been foreseen; and, years ago,

when the early stages of a long imprisonment were passed in a state of solitary confinement, such treatment was found not to correct the soul but to crush it, the issue being the loss of reason, and sometimes even death; and that cannot have been intended to save us, at the outset, which results in our undoing in the event. And selfishness, whether it dresses itself in a religious garb or not, is a vain attempt at voluntary self-confinement, which, having only self to feed upon, sets up disease at the very beginning, and, when worked out to its logical conclusion, issues in self-destruction or suicide in the end.

Saving the soul, then, does not mean separating it, any more than saving our money means hoarding it; and a miser is not to be accounted rich merely because he has riches; for what, after all, is money unless we spend it; and what avails our spending unless we are careful to spend it well? Nor, again, does saving money mean a mere collecting of coins; nor is the fact that I have a thousand such coins under my hand a proof that I am a rich man; for they may belong to another, or I may mean them never to be spent; in which case I am as poor as if I had them not.

It is the relation in which I stand to the coins that determines whether I am rich or

poor ; the attempt to realise their value by a wise investment, or the laying them by to-day that I may have something with me to expend to-morrow. Such is what I mean by saving my money ; whereas if I am a miser I shall manifestly sacrifice my money by the very means I have taken to save it.

And so is it also with the salvation of the soul ; and, just as in the parable the man who hid his pound at the outset had it taken away from him in the event, so the man who hides away his soul in a napkin now will certainly wake up to find he has lost it another day. Money, whatever shape it may take, is not an end in itself, nor, again, is the end of the soul in itself but in God ; and as you may as well be without money if you will not buy, so you may as well be without a soul if you will not believe.

Think of this again : a miser contemplates his money as an end in itself ; and, setting out his coins before him and making them chink, the echo of themselves is all that he gets out of them ; and so a man may fasten his attention upon himself, turn himself over, and listen only to his own thoughts until he mistakes a morbid introspection for the saving of his soul.

But, I repeat it, the soul is no more an end in itself than is money, and as you do not

realise the virtue of money until you lay it on the counter, so you can only save your soul by leaning it upon God.

This is true of us in every aspect of our being, for no sooner are we empty of food from without than we commence feeding on ourselves within, and such consumption ends in death.

It is a delusion, then, of a dangerous kind to imagine that the soul, any more than the body, can continue to live in an exhausted receiver, when in reality its life is dependent upon God, and can only thrive in the atmosphere of heaven.

And where such delusions are entertained the common sense of the world judges men by their fruits—which is right; but then goes on to take their own account of their action for granted—which is wrong; until “saving the soul” comes to be identified with a process which really destroys it, and men suspect the doctrine as such, instead of releasing the phrase from an abuse which misrepresents it; with the consequence that the value of the soul and the peculiar concern of each man in himself comes to be ignored or deliberately set aside, to the great loss of the individual and the race.

The solitude of the spiritual life, then, is not absolute, or it would mean death; but

being alone in spiritual things signifies being alone with God, who contains within Himself the substance of all society. Nevertheless, since such an attitude of reserve is open to abuse, and has from time to time undoubtedly been abused; since, that is, men have sometimes withdrawn themselves from the business of life, not so much to educate their spirits as to shirk their obligations, the world in its turn not unnaturally watches us with a jealous eye in order to see whether the solitude we are seeking is genuine, and whether it is only a more complete independence of others, or a more immediate dependence upon God of which we are in search; whether, that is, we are bent, if possible, on escaping out of the world, so as to be no longer in it, or are seeking to remain in the world and yet to be no longer of it.

IV

But with this reservation—and it is important—a man may rest assured that in making his soul his first concern he will be doing the best he can for his neighbour as well as for himself; and that it argues a confusion of thought if we neglect others on the plea that we must save ourselves, or

presume to neglect ourselves on the plea that we must save others.

No, we have duties towards both, and the question is which of these two duties should engage us first; in other words, the problem is how to bring power to bear upon the right point, and how to proceed in the right order.

Consider this attentively: spiritual solitude signifies direct communion with the Spirit of God, whereas, amid the busy activities of the world, numberless objects intervene to hide Him from us.

Some there are in the world, I know, who reflect instead of hiding God's glory, but are not these the exception rather than the rule, and are they not, moreover, precisely those who have been with God first and have stepped forth from His presence into the world afterwards? Otherwise, for the most part, the world but faintly reflects the light of Him who made it, and at the best when we view it there we see but as through a glass darkly, whereas in direct communion with God we come nearer to seeing Him face to face.

It makes all the difference which end we start from; and while it is certain that the society of the world as such unfits us for communion with God, it is equally certain that,

if we commence at this and not at that end, direct communion with God first is the one sure preservative against the snares that confront us in the world afterwards. For the world, remember, has a glamour of its own that is apt to enthrall us; and so great is the din of it, and so bewildering its distractions that preparation of a special kind is necessary if we are not to succumb.

It is as necessary, then, to adorn the soul with spiritual clothing as it is to dress the body with material clothing before we step out into the world; and while a man who feels at home in every other society will not necessarily find himself at home in Court, let him once come to feel himself at home in Court, and he will be ready then to go anywhere.

And yet men are not easily convinced of the virtue of preparation; it does pay to pray, but they do not at first see this. They see, indeed, how often others fail in spite of prayer, but they do not see the mischief from which prayer has saved them. They are apt to begrudge the time that is occupied in spiritual exercises, but they forget to ask how much time is wasted for the want of them.

It is the same so far, whether our aim is towards ourselves or towards others; the

world needs not personalities as such, but prepared personalities to save it, souls alone being able to minister to souls ; and the men of weight in the world are those who see this soonest, who recognise, that is, how useless must be that salt which has already lost its savour, and how equally unavailing must be our lamp, whether we set it on a stand without lighting it at all, or light it first and put it under a bushel afterwards.

V

It is plain, then, that separation does not save the soul, but rather destroys it, and that the question as between my neighbour and myself is one not of choice, but of distribution.

The order is plain in the teaching of our Lord : " Watch and pray." Why? As a matter of prevention, "lest ye enter into temptation." "Cast out first the beam that is in thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote that is in thy brother's eye." It is first, "Come unto Me," and then, "Go ye into all the world"; "Learn of Me," first, and, "Teaching them to observe whatsoever I have commanded you," afterwards; and although in His own case the

prince of this world had nothing in our Lord, yet the proportion of prayer to preaching, of waiting to working is one of the characteristics of His mission ; for He seemed to be doing nothing for thirty years, and then did all that He had to do in less than three ; and even within the narrower compass of His ministerial life as such, there was a wondrous balance of activities between the repose and quiet on the eastern side of the lake of Galilee, and the in-and-out life of activity on the west ; and, on the whole, if our Saviour was able to save us when He came to this earth, was it not because He had been in the bosom of the Father in heaven beforehand ? and, once more, did not Martha incur some blame from our Saviour, and do some harm to herself, by her restless activity and want of repose, whereas He seems to have appreciated the more delicate form of attention on Mary's part because she began by sitting at His feet ?

VI

Do not suffer the excitements of life, then, to distract you from its main purpose ; nor the particular excitements of your own life to distract you from yourself.

It is only when we see the gospel out of

its true proportion that we attempt to apply it only to others or to appropriate it merely to ourselves ; for the same Saviour who began by teaching us to mind ourselves went on afterwards to say we must love one another ; and the very Apostle who declares that for him to live is Christ also reminds us that the whole Christian community forms the body of Christ ; thereby showing that the text which fastens our attention upon the individual soul must be supplemented by another text which refers us to the Christian society.

The doctrine of the salvation of the soul, then, so far from being a selfish doctrine, is incompatible with selfishness, or with that state of separation to which it everywhere ministers ; it is not a selfish doctrine because he that would save his soul must follow Christ and not himself, and whosoever would save his life must lose it. And in a day like our own we need to imbibe some of our Saviour's love for souls, and to realise once again the responsibility of looking in the first instance to our own ; especially is this so now that the means of rapid locomotion are multiplying around us on every side and ministering to that restless instinct which, seeing its opportunity everywhere, would be always on the move. The solemn admonition, " Be still, and know that I am God," falls strangely on our

ears in these days and seems perhaps impossible.

It seems impossible, because while it is one of the happy characteristics of our time that men are more alive than once they were to the evil and misery that surrounds them, they have acquired a strange habit of going forth to meet this trouble not merely with the hope of diminishing it, but also under the vague delusion that they can destroy it quite; no wonder, then, that they have no time for anything and achieve nothing, and that we so often witness what a teacher of the last century described as "the pathetic spectacle" of men who in their desire to benefit others are seriously neglecting themselves.

The doctrine of the salvation of the soul is a pregnant doctrine, and has in fact given birth to what is best in all our modern movements; and in a day when men are tempted to educate, or attempt to educate, without religion, to speak of the equality of men as though it were a discovery of the twentieth century, and to describe the Church as the enemy of progress, it will be wise to remind them that it was our Lord who discovered the human soul and demonstrated its worth by dying to save it; that it was our Lord who fastened the attention of the world upon that innermost substance which the individual

shares with all, as distinguished from those trappings and artificial accidents, such as birth and station, which separate us one from another ; that the liberation of the captive and the compulsory education of the child are but various and inevitable phases of the gracious and glorious doctrine that not a sparrow falls to the ground without our Heavenly Father, that the very hairs of our head are all numbered, that the Good Shepherd knows His sheep and calls them all by their names, that He leaves the ninety and nine in the wilderness in order to seek after that which is lost ; that we are to covet earnestly the best gifts and multiply every talent God has given us ; that God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son to the end that all that believe in Him should not perish but have everlasting life ; and that it will, therefore, profit a man nothing if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul.

III

THE HEART OF MAN



III

THE HEART OF MAN

“And He spake many things unto them in parables, saying, Behold, a sower went forth to sow.”—*MATT. xiii. 3.*

THE parable of The Sower was the first parable uttered by our Lord, and so constituted a new departure in His teaching; it is also one of the few instances in which our Saviour supplied an exhaustive explanation of His own words; and it ushers in that famous series recorded in St. Matthew xiii., which, as variously illustrating the conception of the Church of God, are commonly known as Parables of the Kingdom. The moment came, and with it the Word; the cry, as it were, going up, “Hear, O Heavens, and give ear, O Earth, for the Lord our God hath spoken,” and the subsequent history of the Church is the history of that Word; for the Church of God is the organ through which He

speaks to us, and the lesson of this first parable shows how telling that speech has been, and how variously it affects the heart of man.

The parable of The Tares presents the spectacle, so strange and terrible in its significance, and so bewildering in its confusion, of that admixture of good and evil within the Church itself which it is beyond the power of man to disentangle. "An enemy hath done this" "while men slept."

The parable of The Mustard Seed reminds us of the small and apparently poor beginnings of a society that is destined to fill the earth. The Church is interesting whether you view it as a visible society, or as a subtle, spiritual force: it provides splendid buildings and imposing ceremonies, and, so far, has an outward and visible glory of its own—a glory which serves to confront and to counteract the glamour of the world, and is evident to the eyes of men; or, it hides itself within the human heart, and spreads and develops itself into a silent and subtle influence throughout society.

And then, after the parables of The Mustard Seed and The Leaven comes the parable of The Hid Treasure; and here we stumble against the Word; and what seems to be an accident of the moment changes the course of

a life ; while in the parable of The Pearl of Great Price we recognise its virtue from the outset and straightway sell all we have that we may buy it ; and last of all, in the parable of The Draw Net, comes the critical moment, when everything has to be weighed and sifted, and when a precise and irrevocable judgment must distinguish the good from the bad.

Such are the chief aspects of what has been described as one of the few original ideas introduced into this world—the idea, that is, of one kingdom which should comprise within itself all other kingdoms ; of a Church of the living God in which men of all nations were to seek their home, and under the shadow of whose wings they might everywhere find a refuge.

Much, of course, might be said upon so vast and fruitful a theme, but I am to speak to you now of the first only of these parables and to ask you to trace with me the history of this seed.

A parable, as you know, teaches us about one thing by placing it alongside of another ; and in the present instance our Saviour places the word close against the seed in order that by glancing with the mind's eye from the one to the other the thing which is not seen may be made known by that which doth appear.

I

And first, it is easy to miss the significance of our Lord's sayings if you allow yourself to forget who our Lord was: to suppose that He was only man because He was perfect man; and because He had emptied Himself of His glory to forget that He had ever had it.

It is, we know, a mark of greatness everywhere to hide itself, and we sometimes say of one who is great that he does not seem so; that when we are with him he appears as other men; and that had we not known of his distinction we could never have guessed it. And since our Lord's condescension was consummate it would only be by degrees that His disciples would appreciate Him; so that even in the case of St. Peter our Saviour's entire visible presence had been with him some time before the apostle realised who He was; and in the event it was not flesh and blood that revealed this unto him, but, "My Father which is in heaven."

Because our Lord hides His glory, then, we must not allow ourselves to ignore it, and because His teaching is so human we must not say that it is not Divine.

A merely human teacher uses the illustration that is ready to his hand, whereas a

teacher who is Divine uses one of his own making.*

The distinction is important and the difference profound. Known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world, and apart from Him was not anything made that was made; and since all that was made was of a piece, part answering to part, and the phenomena of nature being intended from the outset and in the Divine counsels to illustrate the lessons of grace; since God "hath left nothing imperfect," but has "made all things double one of another," we discern something more than a mere bold metaphor when He declares "the seed to be the Word of God," and the parallel is perfect because it belongs to the original creative design.

You place an ornament on one side of your shelf in order that it may match an ornament on the other; or in attempting to translate a phrase in one language you seek for the phrase which answers to it in another. So in regard to the entire universe God contemplated His creation as an idea within His own mind before He gave expression to it in the visible world outside Him; and, in His view of it, there was a parallel between a visible and an invisible thing, and one was to serve as an illustration of the other—"the seed is the Word of God."

* See Trench on The Parables.

II

And next, observe that it is the soil that changes throughout and never the seed ; and that it is the various condition of the soil that determines the various history of the seed.

Either it falls by the wayside and the birds of the air devour it ; or it falls in rocky places, and springs up forthwith, but the sun presently shines and it withers away ; or perhaps it falls among thorns, and the thorns spring up and choke it ; or it falls once more, on good ground and brings forth fruit.

Consider this for a moment : the soil represents the heart of man, in every case, and the seed is in every case the Word ; and in every case the seed is sown in the soil, and yet the outcome in every case is different.

Thus the whole drama of religion is worked out within the human heart ; out of that heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, and every kind of sin ; and there, too, within the same heart must the Holy Spirit exert His unseen influence and execute His unseen work upon the soul of man. Wherever it is a question of character, of what a man is as distinguished from what he does, it is the heart that is the seat and centre of interest. "When there is a question," says

St, Augustine, "as to whether a man is good one does not ask what he believes, or what he hopes, but what he loves."

Here is the pulse ; and, if you would know how he is, you must know how to feel it ; the effort of the gospel of Jesus Christ is concentrated upon the education of the soul, and more particularly of that part of it which is known as the heart.

III

We shall see, then, how various may be the condition of the soil, how various the attitude of the heart towards the heavenly word.

The wayside comes first ; and this is generally understood to signify the beaten track ; a streak of white across a field of green, and it is the tread of the foot that has made it. There was a time when all was green and fresh, but the tramp, tramp, tramp of heavy feet has worn it out and worn it down. The effect of any one tread may be imperceptible, but the desolation after many days is plain. The heart has been exposed, the rude, rough contact of the world has done its work ; and the word can only lie on the surface, until Satan comes and sweeps it away.

Here we see what society does for us if we

are off our guard when we enter it, or surrender ourselves to it for any length of time without bringing some antidote with us; even where it is of the best there is much in it to shock us at the first, and it is only the deadening effect of custom that reduces the shock and destroys it afterwards. You have been taught a reverence for holy things, perhaps, and respect for those who minister in them; but what becomes of all this when you come to close quarters with the minister himself, or mix with those who regularly absent themselves from his ministrations, and care for his company only so far as he winks at their weakness? Remember, too, that almost any individual in a crowd is better than the crowd itself; conscience has a fair chance with us when we are alone; it speaks with distinctness, we hear its voice; it brings the blush to our cheeks, and checks the onward march of sin; but in society it is otherwise, others are there to echo our evil thoughts and words, to lend a certain sanction to them, to make us feel at home with them, to carry them out to lengths we never dreamed of; and encouragement, issuing in a desperate kind of boldness, and the deterioration and hardening of the heart, is the outcome of all these "mutual cheers and imprimaturs."

Arnold felt this at Rugby; it was the group-

ing of boys that frightened him, more than the particular boys that composed the group.

"Do you see," he said to one of his masters—"do you see those two boys walking together; I never saw them together before; you should make an especial point of observing the company they keep; nothing so tells the changes in a boy's character."

He knew how quickly and how easily the standard falls where there is contact with others who are as bad or perhaps worse than ourselves; there is never more than the one tread at the one time, but it is quickly followed by another, and yet another, until we grow used to the tread; acts of cowardly acquiescence repeating themselves and ripening at length into habits, until we settle down in the end to a state of hardness. No one person, perhaps, has done this, but a hundred persons have helped to do it.

Our ideals are so rudely treated and so ruthlessly trampled upon that it is no easy matter to keep our hold upon them. Can this thing really be right or necessary if no one heeds it? Can that thing be wrong if every one does it? Every one, of course, does not do it; but our society is apt to absorb us quite as though it were the whole world; and we say, "Who am I that I should set up my individual judgment against that vast

body of opinion which hems me in and encompasses me round about?"

There is a certain false shame which is the peculiar product of the world, a certain temper, as difficult to analyse as it is to resist, but so urgent as to make everything that has to do with religion seem foolish or futile in comparison.

Surrender yourself to this influence and you will blush to be honest, and apologise for the most ordinary display of natural affection. And Revelation teaches us to recognise the root of all this in a certain subtle spirit of pride; a canker which, however speciously it may disguise itself, will be found to eat its way first into the heart, and afterwards into the whole character of the man. Thus Scripture speaks of the hard heart as the outcome of this monotonous action; and the Church provides us with a rival society and an atmosphere of change—an atmosphere in which we can warm and melt the heart by bringing it into contact with other hearts, better and stronger than itself; hearts that are battling with the same diseases and difficulties as its own. The Church provides us with a city of refuge to flee unto; a place in which to hide ourselves. Here it is that our hard hearts melt again into lovingkindness; the language of religion sounds natural here; and as the society of the

world carries out and confirms the spirit of compromise within us, so the society of the Church recognises, elicits, and realises our longing after better things. And we are only using the same weapon on a smaller scale when we collect our people into guilds and confraternities within the Church; the aim, so far, being to pay the world back in its own coin, to give men the strength of fellowship, and to confront the spirit and glamour of the world with a worship that unites them with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven.

Beware, then, dear brethren, of the hardening effect of contact, mere daily contact, with the world; have an anxious and even tender care for the heart; watch over it day by day, and "Keep it ever warm by always living in it." The Church of God provides it with a congenial home and seeks ever to break up its ground, lest it should become permanently hardened and stereotyped in sin, and to sow the good seed in a soil prepared to receive it.

IV

Or perhaps the seed falls on shallow soil, where there is not much earth; with the old heart, still hard and unbroken, a little below

the surface. In this case it is quick in coming up, but it is too good to be true, and the fierce sun of its first temptation finds it out and withers it away.

It is easy to be superficial, to rest on the surface of things, and to take your stand upon the circumference of mere ceremonial and the artistic side of religion; to be attracted to all this without any serious reflection on your own part; and seeing how easy things seem in the lives of the saints to suppose they will prove themselves equally easy in you. In such a spirit, perhaps, you may take up with religion as you would take up with a toy, don the surplice, and "serve" at the altar; pose as an authority on this "Use" or in that, and talk of what is correct. In which case you will be starting from the outside, which is never the right side to start from; and mistaking a part for the whole, will penetrate but a little way beneath the surface.

It will be a novel experience for you then to be laughed at for your religion or to be called upon to suffer for it in any way; you never bargained for this, this never entered into the original calculation; and the reason is plain, there is "no deepness of earth." Beware of this: do not talk of your religion but let your religion speak for itself; do not mistake its

mere accidents for the substance of the thing; do not express your emotions before you have them; do not think because religion is sometimes feeling that it is nothing else; do not identify it with a particular sensation, or a peculiar pose, or the mere "stupid imitation" of some saint who takes your fancy. Break up that hard substance below, and secure a good depth to start with; sow the seed in that soil, and wait for it to come up in its own time.

V

Another condition is where the seed is sown, but there are thorns in the soil as well, and the thorns springing up choke and strangle the good seed. The thorns here signify "The cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches."

Strange that two things so opposite in their character should be identical in their effects; strange, at least at first sight, that trouble and prosperity should alike tend to absorb us and to leave no room for higher thoughts! And yet so it is: the prosperous man, perhaps, sees no need for prayer; and the man who is in want has no heart for it.

The world feels as if it were final to the man who surrounds himself with temporal

comforts, buys up all the land around him, and calls it after his own name; possessions which are so extensive seem to have no end, and therefore suggest no beyond; until at length he falls into a habit of self-gratulation, and flatters himself in his own sight: "Soul, thou hast much goods laid by in store for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry." So he counts on the future; and the uncertainty of life, which is so patent when we reflect, never enters his thoughts. What a rude awakening, then, must the sound of that voice bring with it: "Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee; then whose shall those things be!" "Then" would be a new and strange thought for one who had learnt only to say, "Now"; and who, reversing the high saying of St. Paul, had assured himself that it is "the things which are seen" that are "eternal." Such is the effect of "minding earthly things."

On the other hand the digestion may be disorganised for want of food as surely as it is from over-feeding; poverty does not certainly bring peace; and it is a fact, however we attempt to account for it, that men are apt to give up praying to God just when they need Him most. A man will say, "It is so hard to make both ends meet, and I have so many worries that I cannot give my mind

to religion; I have not prayed now for many days, I have no heart for it."

Thus the two opposite extremes of poverty and riches evidently meet here in one and the same effect, and the sin of idolatry is the root mischief in each case; for something in our lives must have taken the place of God if we allow it to absorb us quite, and we cannot really be loving Him in the very act of leaving Him.

It was otherwise with the Psalmist who chose God as his portion; an attitude of soul which is suited equally to a state of poverty or wealth, of adversity or prosperity; and our Saviour presses the truth of this upon us when he bids us seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and leave God to add what He will to us afterwards.

Prevention is ever better than cure, but men seldom see this, and instead of taking God for their portion at the outset they let some other substance slip into the heart and take possession of it first, and not perhaps for many years after does this declare itself and do its deadly work.

Men may live in the world for years without closing with this difficulty; that is, with two alien forces side by side within them. Many a soul has sinned in its youth and fancied it has repented, until, in later life,

after many years perhaps, in some critical moment, and in the face of some abnormal temptation, the ancient mischief wakes out of its sleep and announces its presence by coming to the front and asserting its sway over the soul ; a deadly struggle ensues ; there is a grappling first and then a grip, and then at last a choke, and all is over.

This is how I should account for what to us are the sudden falls sometimes into the lowest deep of wickedness on the part of men whom all the world have believed to be free from sin. They have contracted some habit of sin, perhaps, at school, and have never truly repented of it afterwards ; long years have now elapsed during which the old enemy has lain in the background, dormant, but not really dead, until, an occasion suddenly presenting itself, the awful surprise is too much for them. We are apt to say in such cases that we have been deceived in them as though we had been consciously deceived by them, but the truth is no one has been more deceived than themselves, and the good that we have seen in them for many years has been really good ; it is what has lain behind and out of sight that now upsets their calculations as well as ours.

Remember, integrity is a rare thing ; such men may have been sowing and planting

nothing but what is good for years, it is the weeding they have left undone.

Beware, then, dear brethren, of attempting to keep your feet on this world and on the next at one and the same time, for, in fact, the two are drifting apart and apart with every succeeding moment, and you must certainly in the end fall down between them. Beware of attempting to entertain at one and the same moment, and within one and the same house, two such mortal enemies as good and evil. Weeding, remember, is a definite work that requires doing every day; and look carefully to the soil and see that nothing else has made its home there to choke the good seed when it springs up, for "ye cannot serve God and Mammon." And last of all, there is the good ground, that is, the honest and good heart, and when the word falls here it bears fruit, and "brings forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty."

The question is sometimes asked, how the condition of the heart can be right before the good seed has fallen into it? Has any man any power of himself to help himself, and can he prepare the soil apart from God. The answer to this appears in the Catholic doctrine of grace, which teaches that the Holy Spirit of God lightens every man that comes into the world. The normal home of the Holy Spirit

is, of course, the Church of God, but this does not preclude His working in a certain sense and manner beyond its borders, and theology teaches that a measure of light is imparted to man as such, wherever he may be born, and under whatever system he may find himself; and that his subsequent course, if he is true to that light, will lead him at length to the normal and true system, and to the household of the Church itself. Thus our Lord came to His own, and yet His own received Him not, but they might have received Him, that is, the whole course of their history was adapted to their preparation, but although "God made man in spite of himself, He would not save him so." And it is here that responsibility comes in. If the gospel addressed itself only to clever men, it would only be clever men that would understand and receive it; but since it addresses itself to all men, every man who wills to do so can believe it, and this willingness or goodwill comes from the heart when it has been true to God's leading. It is not that the gospel neglects the intellect, it merely says that the intellect is the key only to a part of the position, whereas the heart is the key to the whole. When we say, "Where there is a will there is a way," do we mean to imply that there is no scope for the exercise of the intellect? Do we not mean that the

intellect will soon set to work and do its work if the heart is in the work also?

Did you ever know any one who loved a subject who had a difficulty in applying himself to it? Does every man know all that he might know simply because he has the power to know it? Is the complicated machinery of the engine of any avail, after all, if there is no fire to set it in motion; or can it do its work well if the fire is not rightly managed? It is a profound saying of our great poet that if a man be to his own self true, it must follow, as surely as day follows upon night, he cannot then be false to any one, and "being true" is a moral not an intellectual question. This is a prescription for high and low, for the peasant as well as the prince, for the man of great intellect and for the man of almost none; and it warns us that a man's first care must be the salvation of his own soul, and that so far from this being a selfish doctrine, it is impossible to be in a right relation to others unless he begins, continues, and ends in a right relation to himself. But this is a state or attitude we cannot prove like a sum in arithmetic, although we can make a shrewd guess as to the intellectual line a man will take who has it, for love in the heart of man constitutes the true response to the love of God, and therefore

to all His works; and a man who loves God will set himself to learn all he can about Him, and in due time will become as clever and intelligent as he can be.

I repeat it, character is the key to the situation; for the training of the affections is the key to character, and the Church who undertakes this training is therefore the key to civilisation.

Our Lord's lesson is a lesson for all time, and when He distinguishes the adequate heart as "honest and good," without any special allusion to the intellect, it is not a partial but a proportionate view He is giving us.

Is not this why our Saviour was hard on the Pharisees? They constituted the religious world of their day, and they were correct in all outward seeming; and yet they are the one class that He attacks, and vehemently attacks, at every turn, showing us that the awfully anxious question for every one is—his own sincerity, without which all else must needs be vain. Count over in your mind all that the Pharisee did, and each individual thing is right, so far as you can see it; it is right to fast, it is right to pray, it is right to give tithes—and yet, after all, the whole is wrong because there is not the honest and good heart behind it.

“Keep thine heart, then, with all diligence,” let the salvation of your soul be your first concern, and within your soul itself pray that the peace of God which passeth all understanding may keep your heart, and then your mind in the knowledge and love of God.

IV

PRAYER (I)

IV

PRAYER (I)

“Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.”—MATT. vii. 7, 8.

THE Sermon on the Mount provides us with the precept, the reasonableness, the character, and the form of prayer. ^{n.p.} It gives us the precept: “Ask, and it shall be given you.” It shows us the reasonableness—for “What man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or, if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him?” It discovers the character of prayer when it bids us use no vain repetitions, remembering that God knows our needs before we ask Him. And it provides the mould or type or form of prayer in the words of the

“Our Father,” which we have all of us learnt at our mother’s knee. ~~And~~ first we have the precept: prayer is a duty of the Christian life enjoined upon us all by our Saviour Himself, and therefore to neglect prayer is to break one of the commandments of God. It is well to feel the pressure of this command, and to experience once again the freshness of its force.

And the impression is deepened when we see how our Saviour supported His teaching by His example. Nor was it merely for the sake of example that He prayed, but prayer was in some mysterious sense a necessary part of His ministerial life; in the moment of His baptism He prayed, and a voice was heard from heaven, “This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.” He prayed on the Mount, and His face and whole form was transfigured; to St. Peter He said, “I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not”; in the Garden of the Agony He prayed for Himself, and on the cross He prayed for His enemies: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” Sometimes, too, He would pray all night in view of some coming event, as before His choice of the Twelve; and He enjoins upon all of us the double attitude of watchfulness and prayer as a necessary prescription for the snares and temptations of the world.

It should be no matter for surprise, then, if we find our Lord's apostles, after Him, insisting upon this duty for others and putting it into practice themselves.

"Now I beseech you, brethren, . . ." writes St. Paul to the Romans, "that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me"; and to the Corinthians, "Now I pray to God that ye do no evil"; and to the Ephesians, "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit . . . and for me that utterance may be given unto me"; and to the Philippians, "In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God"; and to the Thessalonians, "Pray without ceasing"; and to Timothy, "I thank God . . . that without ceasing I have remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day."*

It is plain, then, from all this that prayer is one of the foremost duties of the Christian life; that our Saviour insisted upon this duty for others, and constantly practised it Himself; and that the apostles afterwards gave to this duty the chief place in their writings and in the daily conduct of their lives.

Prayer, as ~~they propose it to us~~ ^{these set before us}, was no mere vague and general exercise, but indi-

* These illustrations were collected from a sermon by Dr. Pusey.

viduals as well as communities are mentioned by name, and many and various requests are made both for self and for others. In other words, a devout Christian is pictured to us as one who has a prayer-list with the names of many distinct persons and specific subjects of intercession; suggesting that (it is more true to say that prayer itself is a substantive work than that work itself is a substitute for prayer.)

II

~~And next,~~ ^{therefore} ~~Prayer~~ is a reasonable exercise as well as attitude of the soul; for if asking be the primary meaning of prayer, is not our everyday life full of it? Power comes from God and is variously distributed to men: and, although much of it is ours without our asking, the general rule is that we must ask for things if we would have them; they are not ours, ~~I mean~~ merely because they lie about us; but we have to bestir ourselves and let our requests be made known to others in order that we may obtain blessings for ourselves.

Then, again, since some have more power than others, they also come to have what is called position and to exert influence, and so men are said to acquire power by cultivating

connections; that is, by bringing themselves into contact with others and establishing lines of communication, and channels through which the power of others may flow into themselves.

And in all such instances the higher the position the more will be the measure of influence that goes with it; and so men who wish to advance in the world cultivate the acquaintance of the highest in the land, and seek out what may be called the nervous centres of the body politic.

Every man, so far as he has what we have not, is more powerful than ourselves, and among our friends he is to us the most powerful who has most of this power.

Such connections, of course, are not attained immediately, but men are reached through men, the lower leading by degrees to the higher, and requests being transmitted from lower rungs of the social ladder until at length they reach the topmost rung of all; an answer reaching us from time to time, and a call, at length, to come up higher. Our common sense, then, in all such cases will constrain us to aim at the highest point, that is, at the most exalted personage; however, we may have to pause at many a lower point before we are suffered to pass.

And here let us pause for a moment in the

presence of the mediatorial system and of the principle of prayer.

Power, I repeat, comes from God; not some power, but all power; whether it be turned out of its legitimate course in its passage through others is a subsequent and distinct question; but the first point is to recognise its one only origin and source in the being of God.

The power that Satan has is from God, but not the way Satan uses it; thus Cain was tempted of Satan to kill Abel, but it was not from Satan that he derived his power; in every several and successive movement by which the act was done it was power derived from God that enabled him to do it.* And so again, as our Lord expressly declared, Pilate could have had no power to condemn our Saviour had it not been derived to him from God.

We may use power, or we may abuse it, but we cannot create it, nor can we obtain it from more than one source; and to say that we can is to teach what is fundamentally false, or to use language in a secondary and not a primary sense.

If, for instance, I acquire a position through the influence of a friend, the power by which I acquire it is not derived to me from that

* This illustration appears in Rodriguez's "Christian Perfection."

friend, nor in the primary sense is it derived to me through him ; everyday language does not aim at accuracy, or I should be compelled to say that, like every other good gift, it came down from above, and was derived from the Father of lights, and that the medium through which it was derived was our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

As, then, it is certain that in every department of life there is an ultimate point of influence which may be called its exalted personage, a number of subordinate points or persons being found to punctuate the passage into his presence, so is it with life as a whole and with that view of life which we call religious; prayer itself, being but an extension of this system, carrying us up and conducting us onward into the highest presence of all.

Consider this more attentively : you go to a friend and ask for his prayers ; that is, you ask him to exert power on your behalf. Observe, it is not merely that he begs for more power on your behalf from some one else, but also, and in order to meet your case, he exerts such a measure of power as he possesses himself. This is often forgotten ; and we are apt to speak as though the prayer of one man were as effectual as that of another. It may be so in a particular case, but in most cases it is otherwise. Let us

return to the merely earthly situation again : a friend who is a favourite at Court, because of the long and continuous services he has rendered to the State, is more likely to obtain a hearing in your favour than another who has done almost no service at all ; in other words, he has more power with him when he goes to headquarters than the ordinary run of men ; so, in that wider sphere, which includes heaven as well as earth, "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man," St. James assures us, "availeth much." This can only mean that the better a man is the more power will he have with God ; and the more power, therefore, will he receive from God.

It is a pregnant saying, "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man," and contains more than we are apt at first to suppose ; recalling another passage—from the lips of our Lord this time—to the effect that "to him that hath shall be given" ; suggesting how we defraud one another, and not merely suffer ourselves, by abstaining from public worship and by falling into loose habits in the matter of our own private prayers.

Nor do I see how this principle can be summarily checked at the passage of the grave ; when I beg you to use your influence for me at Court, addressing at the same time a letter of my own direct to headquarters, no one

would say that I was putting you in the place of the chief to whom we were both appealing, or that I was putting you between myself and him ; nor, again, would such a criticism be admitted if I begged for your prayers, on my behalf, to God, approaching God Himself, in the meantime, with prayers of my own.

On what grounds, then, is this principle to cease on stepping beyond the grave ? If it is an irrelevant objection when we urge it against the appeal for a good man's prayers on earth, why should it be urged, a year later, merely because the same person is now away and beyond this earth ? Why should St. Paul say to the saints on earth, "I beseech you that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me," and afterwards cease so to address them because they are nearer to God in heaven ?

If the argument is good at all does it not apply more strongly to human mediators on this side of the grave than to the same mediators on the other side ? Of course, it may be objected that we have not been told that the saints can hear us, and that would be another matter ; but it is not the objection more commonly urged, and I do not see how the doctrine of the Invocation of Saints, which is now coming forward again for the consideration of the Church in England, can be shut out

on the ground we have been discussing, as if, when we asked the saints beyond the grave to pray for us, we were putting man in the place of God, or betaking ourselves to man instead of to God.

It will, in any case, be allowed, I think, that, at least in England, we have much yet to learn from so profound and fruitful a doctrine as the "Communion of Saints"; and we may come to see, as time goes on, that in this as in some other cases we have been betrayed into an inconsistency and one-sided habit of mind, recognising the mediatorial principle and extending its application to the mystical body of Christ here on earth, but confining the application of it, not merely in a primary sense, but absolutely, to our Saviour Christ in heaven.

And yet, as St. Paul assures us, "We are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God"; or again, that "our citizenship is in heaven." And if we have the express sanction of our Saviour for arguing from the earthly to the heavenly state, and concluding that if selfish man on earth, being evil, knows how to give good gifts, much more will our unselfish Father in heaven give good things to them that ask Him; if this analogy has a Divine sanction it would seem to carry with it the

position I have been pressing, and that we have the right to hope that those who prayed so earnestly and so effectually on earth, will have the power to pray more effectually and more earnestly before the throne of God in heaven. In any case it will not be denied that to pray regularly for the faithful departed, and to ask them also to pray for us must ever serve as a stimulus to our devotions by bringing the other world nearer to us and making it a living reality to our thoughts.

In our own day, perhaps, it may be said that this aspect of reasonableness is receiving and being reinforced by new illustrations from an unexpected quarter, for the discoveries in the realm of physical science, which are rapidly annihilating space and enabling the mere mind of man to transmit messages all over the earth with a rapidity that would have appeared miraculous to our forefathers, may serve vaguely to suggest what must ever have been within the reach of the infinite mind of our Father in heaven.

And when we turn more particularly to the relation of the mind to the body we seem about to open a new chapter in the history of medical science and to be laboriously working towards remedies and cures to-day which were achieved by our Saviour with the consummate power of divinity two thousand years ago.

And if the exercise of an earnest desire and a concentrated effort of will can be made to tell first upon the mind, and through the mind also upon the body of another, the bearing of this upon prayer and upon faith as a condition of its success will scarcely be denied.

III

~~And~~ next, there is the character of prayer, ~~and~~ ~~our Lord here~~ reminds us that if prayer to God is but an extension of that principle which leads us to beg favours from our fellow-men, nevertheless, ~~because it is to God,~~ we have to remember that ~~He~~ is in heaven, whereas we are on earth; that He knows our necessities before we ask, and that we must, therefore, eschew vain repetitions, inasmuch as we shall not be heard for our much speaking. ~~It is~~ otherwise with our fellow-men, with whom we are urgent, presenting again and again with an almost breathless rapidity the various aspects of our case lest, perchance, our words should have escaped them, or they should themselves have missed our meaning. But with God all this must be away since He knows our position better than we know it ourselves, and requires our prayers not for His ~~sake but for our own.~~ *Shiloh*

~~I am not forgetting, of course,~~ that prayer

is not merely asking, but also any form of communion with God; nevertheless its primary meaning is petition, and we do not know how to pray until we have learnt how to ask. And there is progress here as there is in other departments of the spiritual life—a distinct science and art of prayer, that is, which must be learnt and put into practice in order to be known. What, for instance, is the relation of meditation, and what the relation of spiritual reading to the exercise of prayer? How far should we encourage ourselves in reflections, and at what point should they be checked? And then, again, where shall we go for this reading? Shall it be a chapter of the Bible or a verse? And to which part of the Bible shall we turn? All this has a bearing on the character of prayer, for what a man is, and what he does before he prays affects the character of his prayer when he prays. The attempt to construct an oasis of prayer, then, in a wilderness of worldly-mindedness must end in failure because prayer has its surroundings and an atmosphere congenial to itself, and although it partly creates that atmosphere and exerts an influence upon those surroundings, they in their turn will be found powerfully to react upon itself.

Again, when we are considering the

character of prayer we have to remember that it is not an end in itself—on the contrary, it is a means to an end, and as you learn to converse with men not by cultivating conversation as such, but by identifying yourself with their interests, so you learn to converse with God by living habitually in the light of His countenance.

Such considerations as these may serve to remind us that prayer is a work, and a very great work; that, like other works, it requires practice; and that one chief symptom of progress in the spiritual life is the progress we make in prayer.

This is what strikes us when we turn to the writings of the saints: it is often a surprise to see how much they make of this exercise and how much virtue they extract from it. As they view it, prayer has its points of contact with every phase of life, with Bible-reading, meditation, examination of conscience, and confession of sin on the one side, and with the manifold forms of Christian activity on the other. They regard it not so much as a strange insertion in a context that is otherwise alien to it, but rather as the outward and visible expression of that communion with God which should become, as life advances, a continuous fact of the spiritual consciousness, and which must perforce not only at regular

but also at unexpected intervals gather itself up into a supreme and deliberate effort of the soul.

As the musician sits down to his instrument and pours out his soul and relieves his spirit in harmonies which it is not easy to secure or to analyse, and as the poet throws off his various moods in the sonnet and in other forms of song, so should the spiritual man as such pour out his heart before God. Forms of prayer are necessary, of course, as I shall go on to show another day, and this is specially true in what is called united prayer; but for the individual as he prays in secret there should be more than this; for here man can speak to his Maker as a son to his Father; saying words, and using set forms, perhaps, sometimes, but also holding communion with Him without employing any words of his own at others.

As, then, we should never make vain repetitions in our prayers, so there are times when there is no need to say anything at all.

Good listeners are too rare, all the world over; and as we advance in the spiritual life we learn more and more how much God does for us and how little it is that we can ever do for ourselves.

This is what the Apostle must surely mean when he bids us pray without ceasing, since to

be incessantly speaking words of prayer would be incompatible with other duties which God has also enjoined upon us ; whereas an under-current of prayer may cleanse our hearts and fertilise our thoughts under all circumstances whatsoever ; and the still small voice of God may whisper in our ears and inform our hearts and minds when it is impossible for various reasons to speak any words of our own to Him.

V

PRAYER (II)

V

PRAYER (II)

“After this manner therefore pray ye.”—MATT. vi. 9.

WHEN I spoke to you last we were considering the character of prayer; and to-day I wish to say some words about the form, that is, about the “Our Father” which our Saviour has provided as a type or mould for all prayer. For the Lord’s Prayer is not merely one among a number of prayers, but it is the representative prayer of all, and as in matters of taste a standard or idea of the subject must first be set up in our minds, all our efforts being made as far as possible to conform to it, so is it also with prayer; and we ought to recognise in the “Our Father,” over and beyond the special beauty and grandeur that attach to it, as proceeding from our Saviour’s own lips, a framework for all prayers whatsoever; or, to change the figure, the normal

lines upon which all our prayers of whatever kind should be made to run.



And first, we are directed to a Person and a Place outside us: to our Father, and to heaven where He has His throne; suggesting to us how a picture in the mind at the outset will provide a help to our prayers throughout; while the address to God as "Our Father" proclaims the unity of the Church, and that exhibition of the family life which it is intended to portray. Not "My Father," as if I could separate myself from my context, and dispense with the Communion of Saints; but "Our Father," rebuking at once my selfishness which would make me the centre of the world. "In heaven," too, not on the same plane with myself, and therefore requiring a suitable attitude of body and a proper disposition of soul; "in heaven," therefore with angels and archangels and the souls of just men made perfect, for His setting. And next comes the question of His name, which is a holy name, and should ever be treated as such: "May His holy name be blessed and praised"! may we as professing Christians be more mindful of this, and may others who know Him not come

to know Him, and may those who take His name in vain learn soon to do Him honour! So it is that we begin not with ourselves, but with the glory that is due to the Father.

And next, we prepare the way for our petitions by submitting beforehand to God's will. "Thy kingdom come"—may Thy rule gradually come to obtain everywhere, may the visible borders of Thy Church be extended, and every thought be brought at length into captivity to Christ; that Christ "may dwell in our hearts by faith," that "being rooted and grounded in love" we may "be able to comprehend with all saints what is the length, and breadth, and depth and height"; that is, that the will of God may be done on earth after the pattern of that doing in heaven; not as though our prayer were put forth as an attempt to alter God's will, but on the contrary in direct obedience to His command, prayer itself being according to that will and part of the machinery for carrying it out. "Thy will be done"; that is, let everything be done by us in accordance with God's will, and everything that is done by Him in spite of us be accepted as His will. The submission of such a passage is, indeed, far reaching and profound; contemplating, as it does, such possibilities as we can but vaguely foresee, and such surrenders as we have not, perhaps,

the courage to consider. For our Saviour it included the awful sacrifice of the Cross, and for ourselves it denotes what to us is equivalent to the Cross. No wonder that we kneel down for all this, and bow our heads, and close our eyes, seeing what submission it requires of us. "Thy will be done," and prayer is a part of that will, therefore "Let us pray"; and let us have a pattern before us to copy as we do it—the heavenly pattern, the worship of the angels and the saints, displaying itself in one grand picture of wrapt attention, and expressing itself in the language of adoration and praise.

Thus, it is thoughts about God, about His holy name, His Divine kingdom, and His absolute will, that compose the three first petitions of the Lord's Prayer, and not until after that do we come to petitions for ourselves; and then it becomes evident that what is given to us by man is to be understood as coming to us from God, "Give us this day our daily bread" reminding us that the term "Giver" rightly belongs only to God, and is used in a secondary sense when applied to ourselves.

And again, it is "us," not "me," something for others to have as well as ourselves and with ourselves; and it is for "this day," because it is God's will to parcel

our life out to us in portions, as if for us life meant to-day, and we were not too seriously to contemplate any period of time until we could call it "to-day." It is easier, too, so much easier, to live our life a little at a time, and to contain ourselves for fifteen or sixteen conscious hours. Here, if we may say it, is life in a nutshell: to keep the mind clean and well balanced; to set a watch at the door of our lips, and to restrain our tongues; and to do our actions with a right intention; and then to surrender ourselves once more to sleep; let us not be like some, then, who "cannot live to-day because there has been a yesterday, and because there is to be a to-morrow." "This day" and enough for one day, for myself and—for others—"our daily bread." And next comes the prayer for pardon and the significant ground for asking it: "as we forgive." And for the future, "Lead us not into temptation;" keep us from all things that may betray us, give us the spirit of watchfulness and prayer, prepare us to face the world. Dispose the circumstances of our daily life so that they may not overwhelm us, and guard and protect the inner sanctuary of our thoughts, lest perchance they should undo us. Release us from the prison house of sin, and from Satan, whose aim it is to overthrow us; and

from all evils, whether temporal or spiritual, good Lord deliver us. So we pray, so may we ever pray ; amen, so may it ever be.

II

Such is the type, or shall we say the mould, into which the materials of prayer should be thrown : we shall say many other prayers, but after this manner must we ever pray ; we must remember to whom we are praying, and where He is and where we are. We must wish everything that is right in reference to Him before we ask any blessings for ourselves ; we must remember to pray as members of a body, and, therefore, to pray for others as well as for ourselves ; we must confess our sins and desire that the same forgiveness that we crave for ourselves may be extended also to others ; and we must enlist God on our side beforehand if we are to hope for safety afterwards ; and all this must we do because the kingdom itself, and all the power and glory appertaining to the kingdom, belong solely and entirely to Him. Thus the "Our Father" stands firm and stays with us, and is brought out on every occasion, as providing not merely a prayer in itself, but a programme or outline map for all prayer.

III

But you may say that, so far, I have only incidentally touched on the difficulties attaching to prayer, and then only on difficulties of a lighter kind, which scarcely go to the root of the matter. What of the practical difficulty of fixing our thoughts, or the more searching difficulty of persevering in spite of what seems no answer to our prayer?

Well, to take the last difficulty first, we must ~~remember to~~ distinguish between not receiving an answer to prayer and not obtaining what we ask. The more we reflect the more we shall recognise the impossibility of our requests being always granted; things are so bound together in the world, that only Almighty God Himself could know what is either possible at all or best for ourselves. Only think of how much turns upon how little; of the influence of sometimes one personality upon the course of events, and yet of the apparent chance which has brought that personality to the front; the fact, perhaps, of his having turned down one street rather than down another, and having so come into contact with the one individual who has changed the current of his life and brought him to the front. Throughout all the days of our life, but more particularly in the earlier

days, we are asking for things which would be hurtful and not a help to us ; it must be so in the nature of things. A little child will ask for a knife ; are we refusing to answer its prayer because we decline to grant its request ? We give it something else, perhaps, and later on it will thank us for our discernment.

So our Heavenly Father, knowing what things we have need of before we ask, and seeing at once how apt we are to mistake and to misinterpret those needs, hears our prayers and meets our wants, sometimes by refusing and sometimes by complying with our requests.

The true Mediator and Intercessor, we have to remember, is our Saviour and not ourselves, and all prayers must pass through Him on their way to the Father. It follows, then, that the more we come to know of Him the more clearly shall we know what prayers will pass with Him. But this must not be taken to mean that, because God knows our needs without our asking, we shall, therefore, have them satisfied whether we ask or no ; but it should prepare us for many disappointments in prayer which must come in the very nature of things, and should teach us to subordinate all our prayers to the intercession of our Saviour. And next, there is the practical

difficulty of fixing our thoughts in prayer. How many there are who complain of this, and protest that they can never hope to find a remedy for it; every several prayer, they say, brings a recurrence of this difficulty in its train; we kneel down, and presently wake up to find ourselves thinking of anything and everything save the one Being who should be the object of all our thoughts; and not only so, but thoughts are apt to come to the front at such times of which we should be ashamed to speak.

Now first, such experiences are common, more or less, to all the saints; much more surely, then, may we look for them in ourselves. And the explanation they offer will serve also for us; for their contention is that Satan can afford to neglect us so long as we neglect our prayers; whereas to be on our knees is equivalent to standing to our guns, and suggestive rather of the Christian soldier going into action.

Such an attitude, then, operates in the way of a call to arms on the part of the enemy, who at once directs his forces against us by spreading over the surface of our minds vague and odious images which shall serve to obscure the light of heaven.

Nor must we here neglect the old distinction between temptation to sin and the actual

sin itself: as we pass down some of our crowded streets we have perforce to hear language which we cannot but abhor, and which we have no dream of endorsing; and no one would say that we were responsible for the passing presence of a dangerous character who entered our grounds in spite of us and left them before we could successfully bring him to book; so it is not the evil thoughts that flit across our minds which harm our souls and constitute our sins, but rather such as engage our attention and betray us.

We must learn, then, to be cheerful in spite of all this, and not give way to morbid regrets over it, but confront such intruders and order them off the premises the moment we find them there.

So much for evil thoughts; but thoughts which are not evil in themselves may produce evil effects when they intrude upon us at inopportune moments. And some people protest that such a difficulty as this is constitutional, and that they must acquiesce in it as such. "It is useless," they say, "to struggle against it; I have struggled and struggled, but all in vain." Now I have partly dealt with this already where I reminded you that we must prepare for prayer not merely at the moment of prayer but at

other times also; that it is not only true to say that such as a man is while at prayer such is he also at other times, but the converse of this is true also, and he will find that such as he is at other times such will he be also at the time of prayer. Prayer as such not only has duties and responsibilities to the entire day, but the entire day in its turn has responsibilities towards prayer; and those who wish to pray at stated times must in a sense be always praying.

But the philosophy of attention goes deeper than this and deserves more careful study; for what is it that lies at the root of attention? Attention is an effect, and you cannot have an effect without its cause. Is it not sacrifice, then, that is to say, is it not love that lies at the root of attention? Consider your own case: did you ever experience any difficulty in attending to what you loved? Is it not significant, for instance, that a person who loves another is said to pay attention? Think, too, of little children, how careless and inattentive they will sometimes be at their work one moment, and how devoted they will be to their play the next.

Remember, an absent-minded person is not a person whose mind is nowhere, but rather one whose mind is not where it should be; in other words, the mind of a person who is

said to be absent-minded with you is so for the very reason that it is present with another.

I am not denying the truth, of course, that with some there may be a constitutional difficulty in the way of attending to any one person or thing for any considerable time, but such cases are abnormal and therefore scarcely present themselves now. For the rest, I think it is not untrue to say that an absent-minded person must not be described as one who knows not how to attend, but rather as one whose affections have not yet been sufficiently educated; his fault being not inattention as such, because he is attending to—something else, but attention to the wrong thing; not, that is, the absence of the gift itself, but the faulty application of it.

An absent-minded person, then, is often one who can think of no one else save the one who is away; follow him into the presence of the one he loves, and you shall find him able to think only of the one who is there. And what would we not all of us give so to be able to think of God when we come to His house of prayer.

Just, then, as a physician will often remedy one particular ailment by administering to us a tonic, and thereby strengthening the entire constitution, so a large infusion of Divine

love into the heart of man will enable him by degrees to concentrate his heart and therefore also his mind upon such particular exercises of devotion as God may require of him.

But in any case there is a more immediate preparation which comes within the reach of all, such as standing to attention in the first instance, and putting ourselves by an act of the will into the presence of God ; there is the reading of a few verses, whether from the Psalms or the Gospels, to provide food for our devotions and a right direction to our thoughts ; and there is a certain fastidious habit, which we may all cultivate, of repeating a particular prayer again and again until we are sure that we have prayed and not merely said our prayer. And over and beyond all this, it is a help to some to have a picture in the mind such as appears in the Book of the Revelation (viii. 1-5) to fix and solemnise the thoughts, and so to secure the attention of the whole man. As I have already reminded you, if we desire to attend during the moments of prayer we must live the rest of our time in the spirit of prayer. Our Saviour is our example here as elsewhere for you will remember how on one solemn occasion of special prayer He declared that He knew that the Father always heard Him ; while at another time, when prophesying that

all the disciples would go every man to his own and leave Him alone, He corrected Himself—"and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me."

Recall for the moment some great trial in your own life, if you have ever experienced one; and how, perhaps, you were compelled to do your daily work in spite of it, and exercise your mind upon a variety of topics that were altogether foreign to it; and yet how the moment you relaxed or brought your daily toils to an end your mind gravitated easily, and even inevitably, to the trouble which had seemed for a time, perhaps, to be away.

The danger with us all is that we put religion on and off like some special garment, instead of making it a part of ourselves; that is, we fit it on to ourselves from without instead of developing it from within, with the result that it becomes to us a matter of constraint, and sits awkwardly upon us when its own proper moment arrives. But that is not prayer according to our Saviour's prescription, since He bids us not merely ask in His name when we are asking, but also take up our cross when we are not asking; and to turn at any particular moment to a Person you are constantly with is natural and easy as compared with the effort that is necessary

when your two lives have been lived for the most part asunder.

In any case love is the key to the position, and with the difficulties of attention, as with all other difficulties, prevention is better than cure, it being easy to concentrate thoughts at the moment where you have given them a right direction from the first. And, however all this may be, where there is a will there is a way, where your treasure is there will your heart be also ; and had our Saviour known that prayer was a possibility only for some He never would have prescribed it as a necessary exercise for all.

Let us look once again, then, to our prayers and surrender ourselves to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, whose function it is to help our infirmities and to conform our wills to the will of our Father who is in heaven.



VI

GUIDANCE AND COMFORT

VI

GUIDANCE AND COMFORT

“I will not leave you comfortless ; I will come to you.”—
JOHN xiv. 18.

IF you look out upon life, even within the compass of a single day, you will see that guidance and comfort constitute two principal needs of your soul : how to pick your path through the tangled forest and how to bear the succession of rubs and the occasional blows that you meet with on your way. Now at this joyous season of Whitsuntide the Holy Spirit comes before us in two characteristic attitudes, one of His functions being to guide and another to comfort the souls of men ; and in the beautiful Collect for to-day God is said to teach the hearts of His faithful people by means of the Holy Spirit's mission, thereby enabling them at once to have a right judgment in all things

and to rejoice at all times in the holy comfort that He gives them.

Thus, whether it be a question of guidance or comfort, the prescription is for the heart rather than for the head.

Let us think to-day, then, of the Holy Spirit as meeting the wants of the soul in these two principal ways. And first as to guidance.

I

In our day, when men are studying other religions besides their own and are confused and bewildered by divisions among themselves, it is necessary to understand and appreciate the Catholic doctrine of grace—that is, to hold firmly to the truth that the Holy Spirit of God is over the entire face of the earth, that He enlightens every soul that comes into the world, that He leads men through false systems, but by means of what is true in those systems, to the one system of the truth itself, and that He may be at work in individual souls here and there within an organisation without being necessarily at work in the organisation as such.

No doubt some are puzzled when they see “good men” who have no conscious knowledge of God, as if a man could not be doing

good by the power of God without knowing that it was only by God's power that he was doing it; and yet the multitude of men in every system of religion act without reflection and exercise power without ascribing it to God; a boy will spend what he calls his money and give himself airs as though he had earned it himself, when in reality it has come to him from his father; so also with intellectual gains—a man may increase in knowledge without asking how he comes by it, and will perhaps protest that he has hit upon an idea, when, in fact, it is the idea itself that has struck him; and so, once more, in the moral sphere, some there are who, because they have started life with a better moral outfit than others, and are therefore conscious of little or no difficulty in doing what is right, flatter themselves they are doing it by a power of their own.

It is possible, then, to have a "form of godliness" and yet to "deny the power thereof," and it is possible to make a right use of power without knowing where power comes from; and when we find men living and thinking in widely different spheres and under systems that are formally distinct, and yet giving utterance to sentiments that are identical in substance and sometimes the same in form, it does not follow that they

have derived the truth, the one from the other, although that may be so, but rather that one and the same Holy Spirit has imparted it to both.

Parallels of a remarkable kind have been discovered—for instance, between Greek and Chinese thought—which startle us when we see them, and which can only be explained by the unity of the human race and by the fact that one and the selfsame Spirit is working everywhere throughout it.

This is one among many illustrations to prove that true breadth of thought is derived from the precise distinctions of theology and not from the habit of mind which ignores those distinctions.

Look around you at the present moment, when every one is discussing or disputing about education, and where will you be more likely to find the substance of charity itself? Among those who declaim against the narrowness of orthodoxy or those who insist upon observing its definite lines?

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, whether it is found in the camp of the Buddhists or of the Muhammadans, or of the followers of Confucius, as well as in the Church, or only in the teaching of the Church itself; and while the Catholic Church is understood to constitute the normal home

of His working, it is part of the teaching of an exact theology that the Holy Spirit steps outside and beyond the portals of the Church in order to fasten upon individual souls everywhere and to conduct them step by step to the home of truth itself. The point to bear in mind is that, whether within the Church itself or beyond its boundaries, all guidance that is true emanates from the spirit of truth, coming sometimes in the shape of an immediate whisper to the soul and sometimes through the medium of another being like ourselves.

The multitude of such counsels, as they come pouring into our minds, are too often taken as a matter of course or accepted as the outcome of some good fortune or happy accident in our lives instead of being referred to their right source in the Person of the Holy Spirit Himself.

Indeed, the doctrine of Divine Providence as such, grand and glorious though it is when we contemplate it steadily, is apt to come and go and not to stay with us; we pick it up and hold it for a time, and then something distracts us and we drop it, and all action on its human side is so suggestive of the commonplace that it is not easy to see how it may also be Divine.

Now, the message of Whitsuntide comes as

a rebuke to this habit of mind by recalling to us the person and office of the Holy Spirit and reminding us that one special function of His work is to guide us into all truth.

Had Nathan come to David in our day, we should, perhaps, have said, "How fortunate!" or, "What a strange coincidence!" But "The Lord sent Nathan to David" is the more direct language of inspiration; and because it is God's will to lift the veil of His providence within the pages of the Bible itself, we must not imagine that He suspends that providence when we come outside it.

A large proportion of the unhappiness we experience in this world is the outcome of a hopeless attempt to ignore this majestic truth, and to "live and move and have our being" independently of that providence upon which, in fact, we all of us absolutely depend. And if Holy Scripture comes to us, not by the will of man, but because holy men of old spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, such guidance was given first to them that it might be extended afterwards to us, and that by patience and comfort of those Scriptures we might have hope.

And so now, in the everyday affairs of life, if we see our way out where once it all seemed dark, if the way is now being made gradually plain before our face, such guidance is due

ultimately to Him whose function it is to lead us into all truth, and who, in so doing, brings comfort to our souls.

In one respect, indeed, the two thoughts of guidance and comfort may be said to coincide, or, at least, to overlap ; for, if we may not say that comfort is identical with guidance, it is certain that guidance of every kind is a form of comfort. But the thought of comfort may, of course, be considered also by itself, as representing a distinct side of the Holy Spirit's work.

II

Here, again, how apt we are to acquiesce in merely secondary causes and to rest in merely human means.

When some trouble overtakes us and our neighbours come pouring in with words of sympathy and lovingkindness we are touched, perhaps, and even amazed by what is to us a new experience, and we protest that never until now did we know how many friends we had ; but do we always ask who sent them ? We should thank God if they said they came from God, but because they do not say it we forget it, and fall back again upon the loose and faithless talk about " luck," or " accident," or " good fortune."

Consider this carefully : look back over five years or ten years and count up the troubles, whether of mind or of body, that have happened to yourself or to your friends, and then reflect that this represents on a small scale and within a narrow compass what is going on, in fact, all over the earth. And then extend your thoughts back and back into the past, and remind yourself that every generation for hundreds, or even thousands, of years has witnessed a succession of similar phenomena, gather up your impressions into an inference, and say, as others have said before you, that "man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward." And now turn from this for a moment to another thought, the thought of the unity of creation, and the evidence of design, and the teaching of revelation as to providence ; and then say whether, in the light of all this, it is possible to regard these instances of suffering—instances that are to be counted not by hundreds and thousands merely, but also by millions—whether it is possible to regard such regularly recurring events as mere incidents without any design ; whether it is possible for you to be struck by them and yet for Almighty God not to note them down, or for you to be arrested and perplexed by them and for Him not to find any place for them in the outline of His plan.

Our mistake in all our troubles is that we are apt to fasten our attention upon them, to view them by themselves, instead of looking up to see who sends them; to view them apart, instead of referring them to their context; to place them so near to our eyes that we can see nothing else.

And yet you do not realise a picture by pressing your face against it; it is but a fragment and a smear that you see when you attempt to see it so.

On the contrary, if it is to assume its proper shape and to proclaim its proper purpose, if, in other words, you are to realise a true perspective, you must hold the picture from you and view it at arm's length, since it is impossible to understand or appreciate a part if you mistake it for a whole.

So with the living and moving scene around us; what a terrible blotch it appears when trouble is nigh at hand, and yet what a striking picture it presents when we look back upon it afterwards and see it at a distance! Then, and not perhaps until then, we can say, with the Psalmist, that it is good for us that we have been in trouble. Since, then, "design adheres to facts," natural religion itself would teach us to expect that where there is so much pain there would

be also some provision for that pain, and Revelation everywhere declares this.

Here, then, is our first lesson : not to view our successive troubles as exceptions to a rule, but rather as subject to a Divine government ; recognising, that is, that since Almighty God must see all our pains, He must also, because of His Divine nature, have made some special provision to meet them, and that the exercise of this merciful attribute is under the peculiar administration of the Holy Spirit.

It is easy to say this, but not so easy to see it, especially in that hour when we need to see it most.

The truth is that trouble is a severe test : the entire secret of a man's religious life coming, at such a time, to the surface, and the doctrine of a Divine purpose often dying away on his lips as he attempts to declare it. "No doubt," he will say, in icy tones—"no doubt this is all for some wise purpose." "No doubt!" Is that so? Or is it that you wish it so? Some one has declared that we never say we are certain without implying that we doubt; and a man who has "no doubt" in the very midst of his troubles can scarcely feel any call to say so, such statements at such times being often either unreal or superfluous, and the genuine conviction, if it is really there, often lying too deep for words.

I heard once of two doctors in a sick-room, and of one of them suddenly felling the other to the ground. A strange and sudden surprise it must have seemed, and a critical moment in the history of their friendship. Must not that friendship have been strained almost to the snapping-point while the explanation was still in suspense? And yet it was done to save life and not to destroy it, for the friend's clothing was in a blaze without his knowledge, and the decisive action, compelling an instantaneous change of attitude, was the best that could be done and a blessing in disguise.

Now in such a moment a man might say, "I have known him all my life, and he must have had a good purpose in doing it"; and such a surmise would turn out in the end to be true. But, apart from this trust in the person, and if you view the action simply in itself, it is certainly shocking and inexplicable. So in troubles of a more serious kind a man must have been living with God for a long time if he is to love God in the hour of adversity. Nevertheless so it is: pain is a fact, and God cannot but know it, and comfort is another fact put forth to meet it, and God must be the author of it.

And this will help us to answer another question, namely, as to what it is that constitutes

comfort; a question that we need to answer wisely before we attempt to apply consolation to the souls of men.

It is easy to blunder here: too easy to be unreal; too easy, thereby, to give pain instead of peace. Sympathy, it will sometimes be said, signifies the sharing of another person's sorrow. Well, yes, so long as you do not attempt to share too much of it: the mistake we make is to say, "I know precisely what you feel, so I can feel for you." No, dear friend, precisely what I feel is precisely what you cannot feel.

Let me put a case: A husband and wife have lived happily together for many years, when at length, perhaps, the wife is taken, and you go to administer comfort. Imagine, then, the surprise and shock it is to the survivor to hear from you that you know precisely what he feels.

"What," he might very well reply—"what do you know of that almost infinite variation of relations, delicate and subtle, secret and most searching, that has marked the long course of our intimacy, and that has been brought just now to this sudden stop? Why should our union have been solemnised in the first instance and separated off and made sacred if a stranger can nevertheless penetrate, and intrude himself into, it and ascertain the sub-

stantial fact about it in a moment of time?" No; it is the truth that makes us free, and we shall never liberate the human soul, whether our own or another's, by practising deception upon it. Power comes from God, even the power by which evil is done, and the power by which we give pain to others or bear it ourselves; and once this is realised it will be seen that no trouble can come to us apart from God, that such sorrow as I have indicated is personal to a man's self; that it is part of God's purpose for him; that since it is meant for him in particular no other soul on earth can know what it is; and that the first duty in all acts of sympathy is to say so. I repeat it, the sacredness of such personal sorrow and the solitude it creates around us, belong to the reality of the situation, and so far our duty is to recognise but not to disturb it.

We are made for the truth, and no mere seeming can save us. Why should my trouble be called mine at all if you feel it as intimately as myself? Under such circumstances and at such times, then, which form of comfort is the truer—"I know precisely what you feel," or "What it is precisely that you feel is what I shall never know"?

The Holy Spirit teaches us in the Epistle to the Hebrews that trouble such as I have indi-

cated is to be recognised first as coming from the hand of God, and next as being intended by Him to serve as chastisement, and last of all as being the outcome of His love. This being so, to presume to explain it away is to attempt to defeat God's purpose, whereas to bow to the blow, and to feel its force, and to appreciate the privilege of the distinction by which for the time being God has touched you on the shoulder, singled you out of the crowd, revealed some new truth to your heart and drawn you nearer to Himself,—such an attitude is an act of religion, and will issue in the transfiguration of your soul; for “Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth.” Our difficulty here again is that we are apt to lose ourselves in secondary causes; and, moving in and out in the midst of all the machinery, to lose sight of the guiding hand that sets it in motion and superintends it as it works.

And the doctrine of to-day helps us by declaring that God's mercy is over all His works: that the great movements of history and the smaller movements which contribute to them are in the hands of God and subject to the control of His Holy Spirit, and that when the machinery falls out of gear and produces what we describe as pain, with its accompaniments

of sorrow and sighing, it is the Maker of the machine who alone can set it right. When, therefore, at such times as these, or under the circumstances of some great trouble we find ourselves confronted by the special services of the Church, and ministered to by the lovingkindness of our friends, we shall recognise in all this the expression of one purpose, the deliberate design of one mind, and the exercise of a function which belongs ultimately to God the Holy Ghost, as the beautiful words of the hymn remind us :—

“ Our blest Redeemer, ere He breathed
His tender last farewell,
A Guide, a Comforter bequeathed,
With us to dwell.”

VII

THE THREE HOURS (I)

VII

THE THREE HOURS (I)

“And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only.”—MATT. xvii. 8.

THESE words refer to our Saviour on the Mount of Transfiguration, whereas to-day we see Him with the eye of faith on Calvary's cross, but in either case it is Jesus only upon whom our eyes are fixed ; and before we go on to listen to His words and to ponder their meaning it may be well to put ourselves into His presence and to reconsider the motives which have brought us here.

I

And, first, this is one of the few services which almost any one in the world, irrespective of creed or opinion, may rightly allow himself to attend, for what may be called the

sentiment for anniversaries is at once natural and universal.

The earth revolves on its own axis, and moves along in its own orbit round the sun, and this law, as we know, issues in the regular recurrence of day and night and the successive seasons of spring and summer, autumn and winter, and in the meantime all things live in the power of the sun's rays, while the attraction of the sun keeps them in their several places. Not merely do we pass on from one point to another, but we come back again and again to the same point, again and again to the same successive seasons—but under all conditions it is the sun, whether in or out of sight, whether in or out of mind, that is the commanding factor in the situation, and by our relation to the sun is the general health of our body determined.

So also the Church of God has her revolutions and also her central Sun; and our successive attitudes towards that Sun will condition and determine our growth in grace and our progress in the spiritual life. We could not always live in the full blaze of nature's sun, nor could we always live in the full spiritual blaze of a day like this. But the Church has her own way of turning, like the world, so as sometimes to place us immediately under the sun of righteousness,

and sometimes, as it were, at a distance from Him.

That things should so move in cycles, then, appears to be a law of God's universe, and that we should be confronted by Christ upon the cross again and again and year after year is one of the conditions of our case. Meantime every side of our nature must be turned towards our Saviour if we are to experience the benefit of His light and warmth; and it is good for us to be here to-day, as we were perhaps last year, and in the years that went before, not as if each successive Good Friday were identical with the last, but rather because this solemn season as it comes round and round again should find us advancing gradually in the knowledge of Christ crucified and in the whole science and philosophy of the Cross. If the Cross of Christ is indeed "the measure of the world" we shall learn to appreciate the Cross more and more in proportion to our experience of the world, and since experience demands time, and time itself is but a convenient name for these successive turns, then we shall learn to think more and more of the Cross and to see more and more into its hidden meaning with each Good Friday that comes round.

Furthermore, those who have never heard of Christ, like those who have never given

any thought to the Sun, may yet be the better for His brightness ; and while light and heat have to travel, and to take time in the process, there is a sense in which the influence of our Saviour is even now making itself felt in the uttermost parts of the earth, and so far there is a sense in which all mankind already is, and not merely is destined to be, under obligations to Him, while in the case of those who know His name without appreciating His dignity, no one disputes His greatness nor His claim to be considered the wondrous phenomenon of history. Such, then, could very well find themselves here without doing any dishonour to Him or any violence to their conscience. Moreover, the Catholic doctrine of grace comes in here to reinforce the argument, teaching us, as it does, that the Holy Spirit, whom our Saviour Himself promised to be a Guide and Comforter to His Church, finds the normal home of His working certainly within that Church, but does not therefore confine His operations to it. On the contrary, it is part of the precise teaching of the Church that the Holy Spirit steps out beyond its boundaries that He may lighten every man that comes into the world, and dwell within the soul of man to supply it with comfort and sanctification,

In the power of these Divine rays, then, all

men now are living their spiritual life, and all men come so far within the sphere of our Saviour's influence. All, then, are welcome, and all have a place in this Church to-day—in spirit at least, if not in person—for what brought our Saviour here was the love that God has for the world, and not merely for a portion of it. Let His outstretched arms, then, to-day suggest not merely the character of His sufferings, but the symbol of His universal sway.

II

That Christ is the distinguished member of the human family, then, will not be anywhere denied, and that a family should stay in its home and observe the anniversary of its hero's death will commend itself to the judgment and to the natural instincts of all sorts and conditions of men.

And when we narrow the circle of our considerations and contemplate more particularly the Christian society as such the claim upon us is, of course, proportionately greater, for, bearing His name on our foreheads, it follows that we must ever reserve a place for Him in our hearts, and it would be strange indeed if we went on our way rejoicing on the anniversary day of His death.

And more particularly still, our intimate relation to Him is that of members to their Head, and where the Head is there must also the members of His body be. Where else, then, could we be to-day if not under the shadow of His Cross; and if this day is more faithfully observed, as time goes on, we must recognise in this the fulfilment of our Saviour's promise that if He was lifted up from the earth He would draw all men unto Him. Such is the motive which constrains us on this day—that it is a great anniversary, that the entire human race has an interest in its observance, and that this applies more particularly to brothers and sisters belonging to the Christian family, and to fellow-members in the mystical body of Christ.

III

And next, dear brethren, what shall be the attitude of our souls now that we are here? How do we stand towards this service, and how ought we to approach it?

I would speak now more particularly to those who perhaps have never been present at such a service before, although my words may also suggest a warning to you all.

Do not attempt painfully and laboriously to

mould and repress yourselves. Remember that religion is based not on feeling but on faith; that you cannot command your moods, although if you are wise you will make a good use of them; and that our Saviour does not expect from you what it is beyond your power to give. Perhaps at this particular moment the minds of some of you are overrun with worldly thoughts, and you will say "all this is unreal to me, because I am not in tune with it." If so, your experience is not unique, and all you have to do is to listen to our Saviour when He speaks in order that His words may duly impress you; but do not examine your feelings. You know what it is, perhaps, to be at sea, and to labour with the oar and to make but little way, when presently a vast wave approaches, swelling its volume as it comes, and bearing you forward powerfully on its breast. Here is your opportunity, and if you are wise you will row hard and use it well, for presently you will once more find yourself without it, and hard labour and but little way will once more be your lot.

So is it with our feelings and with the moods to which they minister, the great bosom of the ocean representing the volume of faith that is ever with us, and the waves which travel on its surface the moods which lightly come and go, forwarding or retarding

our course as the case may be. And in the things of religion nothing is more common and yet nothing more unhealthy than the habit of identifying our religious state with the mood of the moment, and hunting laboriously after some peculiar sensation which we have learnt to associate with our faith. Meantime we cannot, every one of us, behave in the same manner, since we are not all of us made in the same mould.

IV

And now, in turning to our Saviour's words, it is easy to derive from each some lessons for our daily life—lessons on the duty of forgiveness to others; of repentance for ourselves; on our responsibilities to relations; on the condition of solitude; on the blessedness of aspiration; on the rareness, yet necessity, of finish, and on the duty of submission to God. 1. And, first, on the duty of forgiveness to others: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

That in this first moment of an agony that was excruciating our Saviour should have thought of others, and actively interceded in their behalf leaves in our minds an impressive lesson of unselfishness, which is the more striking when we remember that

they were His enemies and not His friends. It is easy for us, looking back as we do over nineteen centuries, to condemn this act; but we have the fact of the resurrection and the long and wondrous history of the Christian Church to support us, with public opinion, for the most part, on our side, whereas to them the facts of the moment appeared to be all on theirs; and the condition of understanding history is to place ourselves immediately under the fact first, and to view it in the light of to-day afterwards. It was a glorious, visible kingdom which many had taught themselves to expect, and there had been a long and weary time of waiting for the coming of Messiah, until at length there was the more immediate hush of anticipation, and the moment, no doubt, had come. But few things turn out as we anticipate, and the long training of spiritual insight is necessary before we can discern the inner virtue of what we see; and to many the manner of our Saviour's coming was a disappointment. They had allowed themselves, perhaps, to expect the gorgeous spectacle of a king surrounded by all the visible splendour and ceremonial of an Eastern monarch, whereas in the event some one appeared not unlike themselves and issued forth from Nazareth. They listened for the opening

words of His sermon, expecting to hear the announcement of some mighty and majestic triumph, and, instead of this, He bid them think less of themselves. What an anti-climax was here! "Blessed are the poor in spirit." At such times a reaction sets in, and our Lord soon found Himself surrounded by enemies.

I am not saying how far they were responsible for such superficial and ignorant anticipations, and, therefore, for the feelings of resentment which supervened when those anticipations were destroyed, but their state at the moment was a state of ignorance, and our Saviour saw this and made the most of it; that is, He put it forward as a ground for excuse, "They know not what they do"; "they do not realise the significance of their own act, therefore forgive them."

Now the lesson for us is plain; we must not give way to our first impulse when we are in the presence of sin, for our first impulse will ever be to resent it, but we must stop and consider, "What should I have done had their circumstances been mine? Or are there any extenuating circumstances which should rightly give us pause?"

We are apt to judge others in the light of our experience instead of in the light of their own; our Saviour reversed this process.

Where we should retaliate, He exercised pity; and whereas He pleaded for sinners, we often treat them as if they were past praying for.

We are too apt to criticise people for doing to-day what we learnt not to do only yesterday.

No one is more severe on sin, no one more merciful to the sinner than our Saviour Himself; and we must try to catch His spirit, learn to distinguish between the act of sin and the one who does it, and give ourselves more to pity and prayer than to vituperation. This, let us remember, is the characteristic attitude of our Saviour at this moment; He ever liveth to make intercession for us; to pray: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," and if He said those words then for the first time, He has been repeating them continually ever since.

2. And, next, our Lord addresses the dying thief: "To-day shalt thou be with Me in paradise." The setting of this saying is a spectacle of judgment, our Lord as the Judge, separating the evil from the good. Not that the Father and the Holy Spirit do not share in this judgment, but it is given to the Son to pronounce it, and He does so here: "To-day shalt thou be with Me . . . "It is the voice of the eternal priest pronouncing absolution after hearing confession. Every conscious piece of

knowledge involves an act of judgment, and every act of judgment implies separation and selection, and our Lord stands here in the centre, separating the sinner that repented from Him, that repented not, and then He selects, "With Me thou shalt be."

It has been said of this scene that our Lord forgave one of the sinners at the last moment lest we should be tempted to despair, and that He forgave only one lest we should learn to presume. There is a sense in which it is never too late to mend, but we must remember that mending becomes more and more difficult the later we are tempted to leave it, and death-bed repentances, which can safely be called genuine, are painfully rare.

One other incidental lesson we learn which has no immediate bearing on this case. We often ask where Heaven is, and how we are to think of it; if it is a place, where are we to look for it and how are we to picture it? But is it not true that places cannot survive persons? How often we hear it said that a place is no longer pleasant because our friends are no longer in it; or that the place has entirely changed, when we mean that a change has come over the people. I am not denying, of course, the beauties of nature, but the law of association is more subtle than we are wont to realise; and although places have some-

thing to do with making persons, much more certain is it that persons make places, and even, as one of our own poets has said, that "the mind is its own place, and can of itself make a hell of heaven, a heaven of hell." Can all the beauties of the most beautiful forms in nature effectually minister to a soul diseased? On the contrary, must not the change start from within and work outwards? If, then, the substance of what we call a place is to be recognised in the people who dwell in it, then surely the answer to the question, Where is heaven? is suggested by these words of our Lord. Heaven is where our Saviour is. And to look forward to heaven is to look forward to being with our Saviour. Is not this the definition of Scripture itself? No light, because the Lord is the light; no temple there, because the Lord God Himself is the temple.

III

"Woman, behold thy son; Son, behold thy mother." Our Lord, as we know, is here speaking of the Blessed Virgin and St. John, and making provision for those He is leaving behind.

Has every responsible parent in this church confronted himself with this principle? Or

are some of you afraid to meditate upon your own death? You have often said, "We must die;" have you ever said, "I must die?" And do you appreciate your responsibility to your own children and near relations in things temporal and spiritual?

The Church, remember, expressly contemplates both: there is a rubric in the Visitation Office, and you should sometimes be at the pains to read it, which enjoins upon the priest the duty of putting these two sides of his responsibility before the dying man. He is first to bid him examine his conscience, and then to admonish him to make his will, and the rubric concludes with words which justify what I am now saying to you: "But men should often be put in remembrance to take order for the settling of their temporal estates whilst they are in health."

The words of our Saviour remind us that God is the Author of relations, and that we must therefore answer to Him for our attitude towards them; and in the present case our Saviour established a new relationship between the Blessed Virgin and St. John; and the sequel shows that they understood it so, for, as Scripture says, "From that hour that disciple took her unto his own home."

And, lastly, there is a mystic lesson to be gathered from this passage which I am

tempted here to expose. We know that the virtue which is associated especially with the Blessed Virgin is the grace of humility, and with St. John the heavenly gift of love; and the two virtues, besides being characteristic of the new dispensation, are intimately bound up one with the other.

Before the coming of our Saviour, at least outside the old covenant, and for the most part also within it, humility as a virtue was unknown to men; and one of the great philosophers of the old world has pictured the ideal man as one who gives presents but declines to receive them: a man, evidently, who holds his head above his fellows, and answers accurately to the modern man of the world who lives outside the influences of the Gospel. But the ideal of the gospel is the reverse of this, and our Lord lays down humility as the foundation-stone of the entire structure; or, to change the figure, He runs it like a thread through all His life and teaching. At one time He says it, at another time He practises it; and under all circumstances He consistently upholds it. While, as regards the other characteristic grace, He expressly describes it as the new commandment that has come into the world with Himself—"A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another"; and, since these two

graces of love and humility are so characteristic of our Saviour's system and so intimately bound up together, it may help to fix this relation in our minds if we identify them once for all with two personages who were so closely related to our Lord in their several ways; if we view them as living permanently under the same roof and under the intimate relationship of mother and son.

For is not humility the mother of love? Is it possible to have either without the other? Or, to use St. Augustine's metaphor, if we "dig down deep enough into humility" shall we not "come upon the summit of charity?"

In one sense, then, we may say that charity or Divine love, which is the sum and substance of all religion, and humility, which is one of its essential ingredients, constitute the peculiar bequest of the Cross. For is not that Cross the very symbol of humiliation when we approach it from one side, and the infallible proof of the love God bears us when we come to it from another?

Yes, dear brethren, you will find that humility and love dwell ever under the same roof, and are lost in one another's embrace; they are inseparable, God has so ordained it; and where you see the one you will always find the other. "Woman, behold thy son; son, behold thy mother."

VIII

THE THREE HOURS (II)

VIII

THE THREE HOURS (II)

“My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me? . . . Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit.”—MARK xv. 34; LUKE xxiii. 46.

THE fourth word on the Cross is in some ways the most mysterious of all; and seems, at first, to speak of despair. And yet, if our Saviour bore our nature, He must necessarily have shared in all the fulness of its power and weakness, so as to be tempted or tried in all points like as we are, and yet without sin.

Certainly the word “forsaken,” however we explain it, has an awful sound, and in our Lord’s case it had also a special history, for He was first betrayed by one of the Twelve, then deserted by the majority of the rest, and finally denied by St. Peter, the prince of the Apostles, himself; and now in the very moment of death the experience presents itself in the most awful shape of all, and the

Eternal Father Himself seems to turn His face away.

"The end," said Pascal, "is always tragedy; I shall die alone"; and if it is part of the bitterness of death to feel that separation between the soul and God which is a result of sin, then so far as our Saviour bare our sins, in His own body on the tree, so far in His own body He would also experience this form of the penalty, and taste for one brief moment the cup even of this bitterness.

In the fifth word Nature speaks out and asserts herself, as she necessarily would under the strain of the peculiar and protracted agony of crucifixion; and there is one aspect of this attitude which we are apt to neglect, although it must have contributed more, perhaps, than anything else to the exquisite pain of the position. We all have our sufferings from time to time, however comparatively slight, and sometimes they reach a level that renders them difficult to bear; but at least in the majority of cases we can change our attitude: turn our body, pace up and down our chamber, and place our hand to our head.

But in the agony of crucifixion all these possibilities are away: the faintness which follows upon loss of blood, and the thirst which overtakes us, and the general sensation of our own undoing; and all this intensified,

in our Saviour's case, by the cruel gibes and derisive shouting of the mob; in the agony of crucifixion the victim has to contemplate and endure, without the power to move hand or foot, or to give vent to any other natural expression of relief. This explains the motive for putting the criminal to death first, and nailing his body to the cross afterwards, a plan which was sometimes adopted in order to save him from the agony and yet to expose him to the disgrace of this particular form of punishment.

But there is an attitude of the soul corresponding to this thirst in the body, an attitude which our Saviour describes as a state of blessedness. "Blessed are they," He says, "who hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled."

To lose one's appetite is never a healthy symptom, either with the body or the soul; and this for a reason that is plain, since body and soul alike must be nourished if they are to live and develop, the sensation of hunger and thirst being an indication to us when this nourishment should be taken. Have we lost our appetite, then, for righteousness? Sometimes it would seem so: look at home, dear brethren, at the life of the family, and see—to select one instance—the ravages that divorce is making in our midst, and hear

the plausible arguments put forward in its favour. Are we to acquiesce in this and say it is inevitable? Or do we hunger and thirst after better things? Can nothing be done to purify family life, and so to prevent these evils?

The whole subject of marriage requires to be lifted to a higher plane, and approached in a different spirit; and every one can do something to bring about this end.

Begin, then, higher up in the history and responsibility of domestic life. Are you careful to train your children in regular and careful habits of devotion? Your servants have come to you, perhaps, from other parishes and other homes; do you recognise the responsibility of having invited them into yours? Is there nothing you can do in the way of precept and example to raise the tone of your own household? Are you careful as to the society in which your children move? Where is the reasonableness of complaining that they have been married to indifferent characters afterwards, if you have sanctioned their mixing with those characters before?

Think steadily of this for a moment and see where you are: if all is not as it should be, become a man or woman of desires, and let those desires pour themselves out in prayers, and express themselves in practice.

“Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness.”

And then look out into the wider circle of the parish: you are in the habit, perhaps, of criticising the clergy, criticising the services, the sermons, or the general administration of the place; are you doing anything to help; otherwise, is not much of this loose and heartless talk a hindrance? Is there no department of parochial work open to yourself? Are you indifferent or are you anxious about the level and tone of the parish? There is room, perhaps, here for a more healthy and genuine thirst for better things. And so, if you look out beyond these inner circles to the outer circle of the Church itself, if the clergy do not come up to your ideal, do you observe the Ember Days and pray earnestly for better things? And is there nothing else amiss in the Church at large that calls for more earnest prayer and effort on your part?

Do you join in the cry about our “unhappy divisions”? If so, what particular prayer for unity are you in the habit of using?

And what tone do you adopt towards them that are without?

If you think steadily on this and make it a subject of prayer, you will acquire, if you have it not already, an appetite for better and higher things.

6. "It is finished." And now, at length, the supreme moment has come, and with it what is sometimes called "the dawn of reality"; although to our Saviour all had been plain and without pretence from the first.

"It is finished": the coming down from heaven; the birth into this world of time; the humiliation; the course of teaching and miracle; the calling and training of the Twelve; the institution of the Eucharist; the nailing to the cross—"all, all is finished now"; the foundations of the kingdom are laid, the entire machinery for the redemption of the world has been set in motion. "It is finished"; we are solemnised and subdued by the very sound of such an utterance, which, in its precise sense, could proceed only from the lips of our Saviour Himself.

But, although it is impossible in the nature of things for any merely human being to finish a work of any kind, that is, to do all for it and to it which is necessary to its perfection, it is nevertheless possible to learn from our Lord's life and to appreciate the principle of finish which is peculiar to it.

Not only do you harm yourself, but you also defraud others, when you attempt to do more than you can; when one member suffers all the other members in the body being bound to suffer with it; while, if we neglect

one aspect in our attempt to do justice to another, we end by doing an injustice to both. Almighty God made man out of the dust of the earth, but we are not told that it required all the dust of the earth to make him; and man's after-attempt to appropriate the rest of the dust as well has issued in his own undoing. Man, of course, is finite; but to see how he sometimes sets about his enterprise you would think he was infinite; and yet is it true to say that any man can do anything? On the contrary, no man in the world can do everything, although every man in the world can do something; and the special snare of our own day is that the majority of men are all for beginning a multitude of things, with the consequence that they finish only a few, and sometimes none at all.

An age of hurry, then, is necessarily a superficial age; that is, an age with a lack of finish.

You find Michael Angelo devoting a long period to the study of one muscle, say the biceps, and perhaps you are tempted to pronounce it a waste of time; and I have heard of a famous singer of two centuries ago—one who continued to sing with conspicuous success almost into the period of old age—carrying about with him one solitary card, with a few typical and representative pas-

sages of music upon it, concentrating meantime his power and his practice upon that alone.

And you may have heard of Turner, the painter, how he devoted himself to some one delicate aspect of his work for a long period, to the exclusion of every other ; and how he was reproached for his idleness by the friend who found him in the early morning sitting by the lake, tossing pebble after pebble into the still water, and afterwards on his return some hours later found him still dreamily doing the same thing. But so far was this from idleness that Turner's mind was developing itself in a most intense form of activity ; realising how no two pebbles produce precisely the same effect ; achieving the power to appreciate distinctions of the most subtle kind, and appropriating and assimilating as many of these distinctions as possible. Remember that "perfection depends upon infinitesimals" ; the little minute distinctions which a loving genius can discern and appreciate, but which escape the superficial eye of the multitude ; and since the multitude of men are thus superficial it is but the few who even aim at perfection, and but the very few who go on to achieve it.

"Amaziah was twenty and five years old when he began to reign . . . and he did that

which was right in the sight of the Lord, but not with a perfect heart." That is, there was a want somewhere, and a falling short in some respect.

There is always the danger, then, of overlooking something because, perhaps, it does not force itself upon our notice: "We are always aiming at great things," says St. Augustine, "but to be truly great we must take hold of little things"; and another Father speaks in the same sense when he declares that "a little thing is a very little thing; but faithfulness in little things is a very great thing."

We are bad judges of proportion until our Lord takes us in hand to teach us: it is easy, for instance, to say now that the disciples were mistaken in turning the children away, but should we not have done the same if we had been with them? Why should the "little things" be allowed to intrude where it was only greater because older people that could understand? And yet the essence of the thing was there: "Suffer the little children to come unto Me, for of such is the kingdom of heaven"; and our Lord brought the "little ones" from the circumference to the centre of the circle, because while they were little in stature, perhaps, they were not therefore little in importance. And does not our

Saviour often surprise us by what He sees ; reversing our judgment, and unsettling our ideas of proportion ; discovering virtue where we can detect none ; and, with the penetration of a loving genius, if I may reverently say it, and as by the light of a Divine photography, piercing the mere surface of things and tracing for us, with awful precision, the outline of the underlying structure. It was so with the Pharisees ; with any merely human critic they might, perhaps, have passed ; they gave tithes, they fasted, they were much occupied in prayer, they observed the minutest things ; to any one like ourselves who would have glanced quickly and restlessly from one object to another, their conduct would have seemed complete, and their course beyond criticism.

But our Lord steadied His gaze, saw through the outside, exposed the dead bones of pretence that were lying below, and could only exclaim, "Woe unto you Pharisees, hypocrites !"

Again, if you turn to the contest of character as between Martha and Mary, a contest so delicately appreciated by our Saviour, should not we have been on Martha's side ? Here was Mary doing nothing, and leaving the whole effort of the entertainment to Martha. But think again—was Mary doing

nothing? There is a whole philosophy wrapped up in the answer you give to this question, so beware how you give it.

First, then, you will say she was simply sitting at Jesus' feet. But what do you mean by "simply sitting," unless it is that she was surrendering herself in body as well as spirit to her Lord?

What, then, is the virtue of such an act? Perhaps, in the presence of our Saviour, she realised she was nothing; if so, was she right or not?

We are accustomed to say that politeness consists in keeping your eye upon your guest and identifying yourself with his interests; and where, as in the present case, your Guest is all in all, what else could Mary have done? As it was she was lost in her Lord, and although there was some work like Martha's to be done, it was work of a secondary kind, and to allow it so to absorb her was to miss the significance of the situation.

No, you may not say Mary was doing nothing; nor was it nothing that Martha was doing; each several attitude representing a form of activity, and the question being one of proportion as between the two.

Martha's was the danger, very common among ourselves at the present moment, of identifying one form of activity with the sum

total of human action ; and our Saviour saw that quantity was threatening to absorb her quite, whereas it was the quality of the entertainment that engaged the mind of Mary. And since His first call to us is that we should come to Him, and not fret ourselves in movements that are executed for Him, our Lord pronounced in Mary's favour, and declared hers to be the better part.

These are only a few illustrations from our Saviour's ministerial life, suggesting to us His standpoint, the insight that He brought to bear upon every situation, and the consequent depth in all that He did. In regard to His work as a whole it was a specific work ; not every kind of work whatsoever but the occupation of saving the souls of men, and with this purpose evident to His mind from the outset He discarded and renounced all else, experiencing a kind of constraint upon Him from first to last : "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened until it be accomplished" ; and again, "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me."

A number of things, then, there are which our Lord never did while upon earth ; but one thing there is that He certainly did, and that was the thing that He came to do, viz., to live and die for the sins of men. He did not say, "There are so many things to be done," but

“I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do.”

We see men on all sides of us to-day failing in health both of body and mind through neglect of this principle, attempting the hopeless task of doing all that is to be done instead of doing what they can, forgetting to say “How” and only saying “What”; ashamed, perhaps, to say “No” to the tempting opportunities of other work that are suggested to them on all sides, instead of restraining themselves and liberating their spirits that they may be free to “do what they do” and so be enabled to perform it unto the end.

The first step, then, in the philosophy of Finish is to drain off such superfluities of effort as are threatening to drown us, to clear the space that surrounds our actual duty that we may have room to breathe and to labour at one piece of work without knocking our elbows against another, and so to pave the way for the temper of repose and the attitude of quiet deliberation that are so necessary to the attainment of our true perfection.

And, next, we have to dismiss from our minds once for all that false greatness which knows only how to live on a large scale and despises the day of small things, recalling the order of advancement as our Saviour por-

trays it, that "he that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much."

And lastly, as including within itself all else, not to withdraw our eyes from that standard of finished work that was begun, continued, and ended within the narrow compass of our Lord's ministerial life on earth and, in attempting to appropriate all that He has done, to do all we do, "as ever in our great Taskmaster's eye."

7. "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit."

Here at length is the last word of all, and this corresponds, in its beginning, with the first. "Father" recalls the relation which our Saviour alone can rightly claim, and the words which follow sum up, in a sublime sense, the central principle of all religion. For is not God Himself the support of the human soul, and dependence the law of our human life? But although no one can escape this law it is not every one who deliberately embraces it; every one longs for freedom, indeed, but only the few come to seek and to find that freedom in the service of God.

Think of this—dependence is a law of life; that is, just as some objects are made to lean against others, whereas, on the other hand, some are meant to stand alone, so man cannot stand by himself, and his refusing to lean in

one place merely means that he must transfer himself to another. He may decline the yoke of Christ, but, if so, he comes under another yoke; and David, after his sin, and with the choice of these two before him, deliberately chose the former. "Let me fall," he said, "into the hands of God, and not into the hands of man." And after all is not this a return to the normal state? "The spirit shall return to God who gave it."

Here, then, is one general lesson from this word, that since freedom signifies not the licence to do as we would but the liberty to live as we should, and since, moreover, dependence is the law of our life, and God Himself its necessary and sole support, it is our wisdom to recognise this truth with our understanding and to embrace it with our will, committing ourselves, our souls, and our bodies to the keeping of our Father who is in heaven.

And the proof that we have embraced this as a general truth will be the consistency with which we apply it in every particular case, whether, that is, our motive and intention are single or simple, and therefore also pure.

It is not easy to rise to this level; and we may live for years on a lower plane, basking in the sunshine of man's praise, measuring ourselves by ourselves, and comparing ourselves among ourselves; and the masters of

the spiritual life concur in teaching us to recognise successive steps or degrees in mortification, the body being brought into subjection to the spirit and the spirit to God Himself Who gave it.

There it is, in the sphere of spirit, that we find the meeting-point between God and man, and they that worship God must worship Him in spirit and in truth.

Such are some of the chief words of our Saviour—words which are the more solemn because of the moment when He spoke them; and yet as we thought of Jesus only at the outset so we fall back again on the Personal Word at the end, all His separate sayings being resolved once again into His sacred and Sovereign Self. Once more we are solemnised and subdued by the central figure of the Saviour, recognising in His Person and all that it suggests to us a centre of gravity for our souls:—

“Thou art the source and centre of all minds,
Their only point of rest, Eternal Word.
From Thee departing, they are lost, and rove
At random, without honour, hope, or peace.
From Thee is all that soothes the life of man,
His high endeavour and his glad success,
His strength to suffer and his will to serve.
But, oh! Thou Sovereign Giver of all good,
Thou art of all Thy gifts Thyself the crown;
Give what Thou canst, without Thee we are poor,
And with Thee rich, take what Thou wilt away.”

IX

THE SECRET OF HAPPINESS



IX

THE SECRET OF HAPPINESS

“For he that will love life and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil and his lips that they speak no guile; let him eschew evil and do good; let him seek peace and ensue it.”—1 PETER iii. 10, 11.

THE Epistle for to-day has this characteristic, that it connects happiness with religion; the tendency to love life and the desire to see good days, with an effort to refrain our tongues from evil, our lips that they speak no guile; with eschewing evil and doing good, with seeking peace and ensuing it; and the thought is pushed even further when it is declared that no one can harm us provided we do but follow that which is good, even if we have to suffer persecution for righteousness' sake.

And in so speaking the apostle is following, of course, in the footsteps of our Saviour, and striking once again the same note that He

struck; for the Sermon on the Mount, you will remember, associates the duties and responsibilities of the Christian with states of happiness or blessedness which are said to correspond with them.

Think of this: a promise of happiness is the first note of our Saviour's teaching, eight several conditions of happiness being commended to us at the outset; and they are certainly astonishing when we read them at first; to be poor in spirit, for instance, and to mourn, to be pure in heart, to keep or restore the peace, to be persecuted for righteousness' sake, and to have all manner of evil things said against us falsely—who is there who would choose one of these, at the first blush, as a means to happiness? On the contrary, should we not protest: "I must assert myself if I desire to get on, and I must learn to push, however politely, if I would find my way into society; the quarrels of other people are no concern of mine; I should consider myself an unhappy man if I had to weep and mourn; and how can any one congratulate me when they know I am being persecuted, and when people are saying all manner of unkind things about me simply because I am serving God?"

Thus on the face of things, and in regard to what intimately concerns us all, there is a profound divergence between God and man;

and when the question is asked, in what does our happiness consist, man, at the outset of things, will be found to say one thing and Almighty God another.

Let us consider this.

I

First, every one in the world aims at happiness; such at least is the rule and such the fact when life is first beginning, the very air we breathe being "cut through with wishes."

It is so equally with the gay man of the world and the grave student who stays at home, their occupations being various, but their ends the same.

We are apt, for instance, to patronise little children and to smile at their toys, as if we all gave up our toys when we gave up our nursery; whereas, for the most part, we exchange one set of toys for another, the process extending itself in some cases from the cradle to the grave, as if we were trying on a series of garments, each one fitting us, perhaps, better than the last, until at length we fell in with the one that fits us quite. Or, to borrow an illustration from this evening's lesson, the question being who shall govern us, Eliab appears first, and we mistake him for our

king—surely the Lord's anointed is before us, and the warning voice sounds out at once, "Look not on his countenance or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart."

Then Abinadab comes forward, but "Neither hath the Lord chosen him," and then Sham-mah, and "Neither hath the Lord chosen this," until at length we ask ourselves whether the throne is destined to remain vacant, or where else we are to look for the chosen one of God. And then the question is proposed as to whether there is not another forthcoming, some one whom we have not been at the trouble even to produce; some one who is altogether away from us and out of sight, the youngest of all, who has only recently come upon the scene, and of whom, as yet, we have taken but little count, and the voice of God sounds out loud and clear, "Arise, anoint him; for this is he."

It is plain that in this illustration persons are embodiments of ideas; and it is the same to-day as it was then; as time advances we are dominated by a succession of ideas, and "serve out successive terms of captivity," supposing each at first to be the final term, until

the call comes, and we have to step forward again, forgetting what we mistook for our "own people," and what we fancied was our "father's house," until at length we recognise and commit ourselves to the idea that fits us quite, and the home that God has provided for us.

Go back again, in thought, to the nursery, and see this process in its very beginning: it was, perhaps, at first but a poor little rattle that was put into our hands, and it was this that was to bring us joy, and so it did for a brief moment; to possess this, we said, was to possess happiness; but it did not stay with us long, and presently we loosened our hold upon it and let it fall to the ground; next we reached out our little hands for another toy, and that, too, was put aside, and so it continued until nursery life was no more, and the time had come for toys of a more serious kind to present themselves. Now, perhaps, it was our dress that we took in hand, and the mere clothing that we put on our backs; we served out our term here and gave our mind as well as our money to the ruling passion of a day, until our interest in this began to yield and to die out, and for a time we fell back disappointed, and found ourselves like a vessel stranded on the shore. Later on we moved again, and this time it was money that we

played with, taking up the pieces, turning them over, and laying them down ; but money played us false and failed us, like the other passion, and gave place, perhaps, to position ; and we were free to acknowledge that it was vulgar as well as miserly to talk of one's money and to hoard it, and that, after all, the question is whether a man is a gentleman or not, and what society it is that he moves in ; this it is, we protested, that constitutes his position and determines his worth ; and, with this idea in the ascendant, we looked out to see what our relations and friends could do for us, inserting into our conversation, as if incidentally, and as being of little importance, such names as we thought likely to satisfy the world ; producing the actual persons themselves judiciously and on occasions. "Is he a gentleman?" was the constant refrain with us at this stage, and the problem before us was how to hit off the secret of being vulgar without seeming so ; until at length the vanity and emptiness of all this became apparent, and we turned to the loftier plane of intellectual study and devoted ourselves to learning and logic. Our own superiority now became as obvious to ourselves as we were anxious it should appear to others, and we looked back and looked down upon the vulgar partners of our own vulgar past. "How

absurd the world is when one comes to think of it!" was then our new refrain, the "one" in question being, of course, one's self; and we bestowed this self, perhaps, upon our friends, and graced their dinner-tables with our intellectual presence, the result of all our learning being to make us agnostics, of course, and to create a chronic habit of astonishment at the generality of people who believe. "How do you know that?" was now to be the easy and contemptuous question we had to propose—a question that was intended partly to hide and partly to suggest how knowing was the one who put it.

Certainly intellectual pursuits proved a great attraction to us, until at length, and after watching them to see how they worked, we began to suspect at first, and afterwards to be sure, that they carried within themselves the evidence of their own insufficiency. Or perhaps the storm of trouble and adversity burst upon us, our pack of cards fell to the ground, and the wind swept it away; health began to be uncertain and the brain to refuse its office, and the old question pressed for an answer once again: "What, then, is happiness?"

And we could say at least as much as this, that we had come at length to know something of what happiness is not.

Then at length, perhaps, after recovering from the first moment of disappointment and disgust, we glanced back over our past, or summoned our past to move in procession before us, and were enabled to perceive from the higher point we had attained that each phase had something to say for itself and an element of truth to represent; that nothing in this world is an evil in itself, and that it is the abuse of it that makes it wrong, the attempt to convert a means into an end, and so to turn the stream of life out of its proper course. It was not a new thing, but a new point of sight from which to view all things that we had wanted and had at length acquired; and now, seeing everything at least in some measure as God sees it, behold it was very good, and we made our way down again into the plain below, and into the world of everyday life, and took up our parable once again.

This is what is meant by saying that a man when he has reached a certain stage in his life will have made his mistakes and found his level; or again, that "a man who never makes mistakes will never make anything," as if we would say that you can learn how to live life only by living it; and in a sense this is true, but it must not be pushed too far.

Experience realises as time goes on what

Faith had always proclaimed from the first; and if we were to take God's word for it at the outset we should be saved much trouble in the event; that is, if we were to believe the experience of others instead of buying it for ourselves, we should know by faith at the beginning of life what we are obliged to acknowledge in fact at the end.

"Known unto God are all His works from the foundation of the world," and the principles that the Son of God has to preach are infallible and eternal; they are not given to us merely to try, but we are asked to accept them at once on trust; they were created and established as well as proclaimed and expounded by Him, who therefore knows them quite.

II

For reasons such as these our Saviour rather corrects our way of going to work than criticises our aims as such. He does not say: "You are seeking happiness, but that is a mistaken thing to seek; you are anxious for rest, but rest is not the thing you want; you are apt to submit yourself to the domination of some one or other, but you should not be ruled by any one." This is not His attitude; on the contrary, He declares that He has not come to

destroy but to fulfil ; and that He will give us that for which our heart is ever craving.

‘ You ask for a life of ease and you shall have it; you are yearning for rest, and it shall certainly be yours ; you are apt to follow and be led, and I will point you to a leader.’ “Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden,”—for “I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil”—“Come unto Me,” and “I will give you rest ; take My yoke upon you and learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls, for My yoke is easy and My burden is light.” And in to-day’s Epistle St. Peter, speaking after our Lord, employs language that is almost identical with the common expressions of everyday life. “He that would love life and see good days,” or, as we should say, “If you wish to have a good time of it,” “refrain your tongue from evil, and your lips that they speak no guile ;” and again, “Who is he that will harm you if ye be followers of that which is good ? But and if ye suffer for righteousness’ sake, happy are ye.”

This, surely, is to say that it is easier to be happy with religion than without it, and the principle is important because men are apt to protest that the religious life is the very antithesis of happiness ; that the gospel of Jesus Christ is to be reckoned among the

creeds which "refuse and restrain"; that some time at least should be allowed for enjoyment; or, in the common language of the day, every man should be free to take his fling before resigning himself to the inevitable; religion, as they view it, amounting to nothing short of a revolution, that is, to the uprooting and destruction, not to the carrying out and fulfilment of our life.

I am not forgetting, of course, the need of repentance or the fact of its having been our Lord's first word: there is, we know, much for us all to unlearn, and to deny ourselves is the first duty of the Christian life; but, except in the rare instances in which men have come to do evil for evil's sake, repentance has, I think, to do rather with the means we adopt than with the end to which they are intended to minister.

In his famous sermon at Athens, you will remember, St. Paul says that his purpose in coming is to declare unto them Him whom they are already worshipping without knowing it; and he adopts their own words as the text of his sermon, "To the Unknown God," as if he would say, with our Saviour, "I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil"; and in to-day's Gospel the principle is pictured for us in the scene on the lake: the disciples had been fishing throughout the entire night, but

they had nothing to show for it, as they were constrained to confess when our Lord asked them to fish again. "We have toiled all the night," they said, "and have taken nothing." Such was the fact, and observe, our Lord does not rebuke them or divert them from their purpose; He simply gives them precise directions for doing successfully what they had been doing all along. "Let down the net on the right side of the ship," and when they did their work according to His word, and not according to their own, immediately they enclosed a multitude of fishes, which was what they had been seeking all along. "We have toiled all the night and have taken nothing." Is not this the history of our earlier efforts after happiness? And not until we let down the net on the right side of the ship do we come to possess what we have been pursuing.

It is well to recognise, then, how much of what we call sin is the outcome of misdirected energy, rather than of deliberate aims at what is manifestly false; the prodigal son was sincerely sorry for his past, but he saw also, if I may be allowed the expression, that it would pay to return home again, and that the freedom he had sought outside his father's house was, after all, to be found within, provided he would seek it rightly; he could not

but speak the things that he had seen and heard, and experience had taught him afterwards, what his father had told him from the first—that the fearful price we have to pay for sin far exceeds the self-denials that are necessary to virtue, and that a man who is true to himself would rather be with his Heavenly Father than with any one else.

Be not deceived, then, by outward appearances, for the Lord seeth not as man seeth, for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh upon the heart; and remember the grand saying that whereas the world comes to us with what seems to be a crown of happiness in its hand, but which turns out afterwards to be a cross, our Saviour offers us what is manifestly a cross at the outset, but converts it into a crown of happiness in the event.

“O Lord, who hast promised to them that love Thee such good things as pass man’s understanding, pour into our hearts such love toward Thee, that we, loving Thee above all things, may obtain Thy promises, which exceed all that we can desire, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”

X

THE WORD

X

THE WORD

“Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God.”—LUKE viii, 11.

OUR Saviour places the seed alongside of the word in order to teach us the history of the word; the correspondence in their course being a part of the Divine plan, so that what the soil is to the seed such also is the human heart to the word that is lodged within it; and what the sun and wind and rain may effect in the one case will be achieved by the influence of Almighty God and the action of events in the other.

Our Saviour declares that it is by our words that we shall be justified and by our words that we shall be condemned; and St. James, speaking after his Divine Master, makes a man's tongue the test of his character, as though it were a pulse betraying an infallible symptom, and the man who could use it well were a

perfect man. And if the strange and wondrous history of words would convey a solemn warning if we could trace it, so on the other hand and in some cases should we be encouraged could we but see at last what had come of utterances which seemed to make so little impression at first.

Coming, as they do, midway between thought on the one side and action on the other, words will be found to exert an influence upon both ; for, while it is a vexed question as to whether it is possible to think without words, it is certain that the way we allow ourselves to employ our words will react upon our entire method of thinking, a man who does not finish his sentences being generally also a clumsy, while the man who is careful to carry out his sentences being, so far, also a clear, thinker. And, on the other hand, words have their definite relation to action, serving as a kind of half-way house, where thoughts may clothe and refresh themselves for that final stage in which they resolve themselves into definite works, and take their place at length within the context of actual life.

But everything is liable to abuse, and where thought is detained too long on the way it exhausts itself before completing its journey, so that as a rule great men are men of few words, their thoughts being

pregnant with action rather than with speech, and their labour one painful and sustained effort to give birth to events.

There are exceptions, of course, to this rule; men, that is, whose words are works, like Coleridge certainly, and Macaulay perhaps; men who do much of their thinking for others and stimulate others by their brilliant forms of expression, but men who have worked so hard within the mind and mouth that they are too exhausted to travel any further. But the course is the same, although in such cases it realises itself in a division of labour, what has been well begun by one being effectually carried out by another.

It is not only in literature that men may be tempted to borrow from others without acknowledging or realising their obligations, and many a man acts upon a word he has read or heard, and points afterwards to his authority as a mere talker or philosopher, adding his own comment, which is intended to be also a picture of himself, to the effect that life is for action.

It is not, however, any false division that is needed as between thought and word and work, but a right distribution of the three—a distribution which has been achieved, of course, only in one instance, that is, in the

person and life of our Saviour Himself. Here at least we have One who is as good as His word, and whose word is with power; One who has nothing better to announce than Himself, because He comes Himself of the Best; One who has been face to face with God from all eternity—the Personal Word, the Word of God; and those who do their best to act upon St. Bernard's saying that work is the strength of speech and that prayer can win grace for both speech and work, will be following so far in the footsteps of their Saviour.

I

Think, then, of this seed and of its history; think of the words that are spoken at school, and how many of these seem to fall upon unwilling or unheeding ears; a master utters them and afterwards repeats them, but looks in vain for results, and is discouraged. Later on a boy leaves the school and the master does likewise, and we are tempted to say, "There it all ends, and very heart-breaking it all is;" and yet how often it does not end there, how often it is startled into life by what happens! The boy goes out into the world and begins making his mistakes; he wakes up in

trouble, is forced back upon himself, and is constrained to draw upon all his resources. The seed is there although he has forgotten it quite, and it is exigencies of this kind that are calculated to promote its growth. He looks into himself and sees it there; he turns the thought over in his mind, and begins to view it in the light of his own life and to fit it on to his new facts. "How true that is! I remember now how often he used to say it to me. How long it is since I have seen him. I wonder where he is at this moment? I should like to tell him what a help his word has been, but I little thought at the time that I should ever require it afterwards."

We are astonished in this way sometimes, in the biographies we read, to see how whole situations and pregnant sayings belonging to men's earliest days are apt to recur in after life. What a power they prove, how their force is multiplied, and how their influence spreads indefinitely into the future, and provides them with a romantic and suggestive history! "I have always remembered what our Vicar said to me at the time of my confirmation, although it is more than thirty years ago now: 'Don't rest until your good acts have become habits.' That is what he was always saying." "What he was always

saying" — that is, it was a characteristic utterance of his; something that evidently appealed to him and so came with some force when he proclaimed it to others.

"I have always remembered!" Well, always had it in my mind but not always held it before my mind. What is it, then, that has now brought it to the front? It is this particular situation.

Thus it is that actual life provides a commentary as well as a course for the word that has been lodged once for all in a mind that seemed at first to pay but little heed; and as when the rain has come and gone and the sun shines out once more we declare that we can almost see things growing, so the steadfast look of the Sun of Righteousness and the water of experience when it is under the control of the Holy Spirit warms and moistens and elicits the virtue of a seed that was dead and is alive again, that seemed to have been lost, but is now found. "Thou fool!" the Apostle seems to say to us who have to teach and who so easily despair of our teaching, "that which thou sowest is not quickened except it die, and . . . thou sowest not that body that shall be, . . . but God giveth it a body as it hath pleased Him, and to every seed his own body." It has often been pointed out, of course, how dif-

ferent one and the same word or argument will look under different circumstances. What a dead letter Scripture often is to us when we are full of life, and how it afterwards comes to live before us when we begin to die; how it is almost nothing to us in the day of prosperity, and how we fall back upon it and cherish it when we happen upon evil times!

“And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had said unto him”—not “heard the word that he was speaking then,” for he was saying nothing— . . . “and Peter went out and wept bitterly.” Thus the word of the Lord had been there, within the mind of Peter, from the moment when it was first put there, but it became operative now, because of what was happening, and because our Lord had come forward to confront it and to recall it.

Sometimes a teacher has to die before his word can become a work; the stroke of death, or rather the news of his death when it reaches us, touches a spring and opens up the entire vista of the past; we are first solemnised and subdued by the announcement, and then wake up to find ourselves passing slowly backwards and forwards, pacing up and down the path of a life that

we are surprised to find so richly strewn with such rare and beautiful roses ; and we pause from time to time and stoop reverently to pick them up one by one, to press them to our lips, to revel in their fragrance, and to wear them about us during the rest of our day. " Yes, how well I remember the very first day I saw him ! I can recall the very spot and the words that he first said to me. At that particular period of my life we saw a great deal of one another and discussed a multitude of subjects ; one very favourite saying of his was this, or that ; and he said he had proved the truth of it over and over again ; and how often he warned me against one of my own failings ! Yes, dear friend, what you said was quite right, though I was obstinate about it then, but I shall act upon it in future, for it comes back to me with added force, now that I see your face no more."

II

To our less educated brethren one or two favourite sayings will serve as a kind of city of refuge to which they are ever recurring to escape the dangers and difficulties they meet with by the way. Or, to change the figure, one strong maxim will be carried with them,

as a balancing pole to steady them as they attempt to cross the narrow rope of life.

"I remember a saying of my mother's" or, "What my father used always to say," or, again, "As the saying is."

Such utterances, as they use them, are for all practical purposes infallible; and it would never occur to their minds to question their accuracy; and every time they use them they become more convinced of their usefulness.

And the same characteristic is to be observed in a higher form, in the lives of the more educated saints whose whole life gradually develops into a manifestation and continuous commentary on one virtue and upon the one word or term by which that virtue is represented. Thus, according to the well-known legend, St. John is said to have preached always from one text in his later years, and to have defended himself on the ground that any one who would rightly understand and realise that one word or one saying would have learnt all that there was to learn; as if he would put it forward at all times and seasons as the key to the situation—"You know the saying—'Brethren, love one another'; that is the one word I have to say." One virtue finds a home in the character of one saint, and another virtue in the character of another; that is, the more we

advance in the spiritual life, the more manifest will that particular word become which is congenial to our nature; our Lord alone uniting in His own person all virtues whatsoever.

From this point of view the history of the world is the history of a seed which is sown within the heart of man, and which grows and spreads until it overruns his entire personality and becomes coextensive with himself.

Such a progress as this may be observed in the first two parables recorded in Matt. xiii., of which the former is also recorded by St. Luke, and provides the words of my text to-day. In the parable of The Sower the seed is the word of God, and in the next parable, that of The Tares, the seed represents the children of the kingdom; the latter presenting the more advanced stage when the word not merely rests like a seed on the surface, or a little beneath the surface of the heart, but has extended itself until it is incorporated in the entire life, so that it has become true to say, not merely that the word is within the man, but also that the word is the man; that his life in every part of it proclaims that message and no other, and that his very appearance, whenever it presents itself,

suggests one word, and only one. Now it is only Almighty God who can speak to us like this, and the Personal Word, our Saviour Jesus Christ, is the one announcement He has to make, the one only Word He has to say. And in the fulness of time He sowed this seed in the soil of the world, where it has been growing and spreading in our midst ever since ; the condition of the individual heart and afterwards of the corporate consciousness determining its various history.

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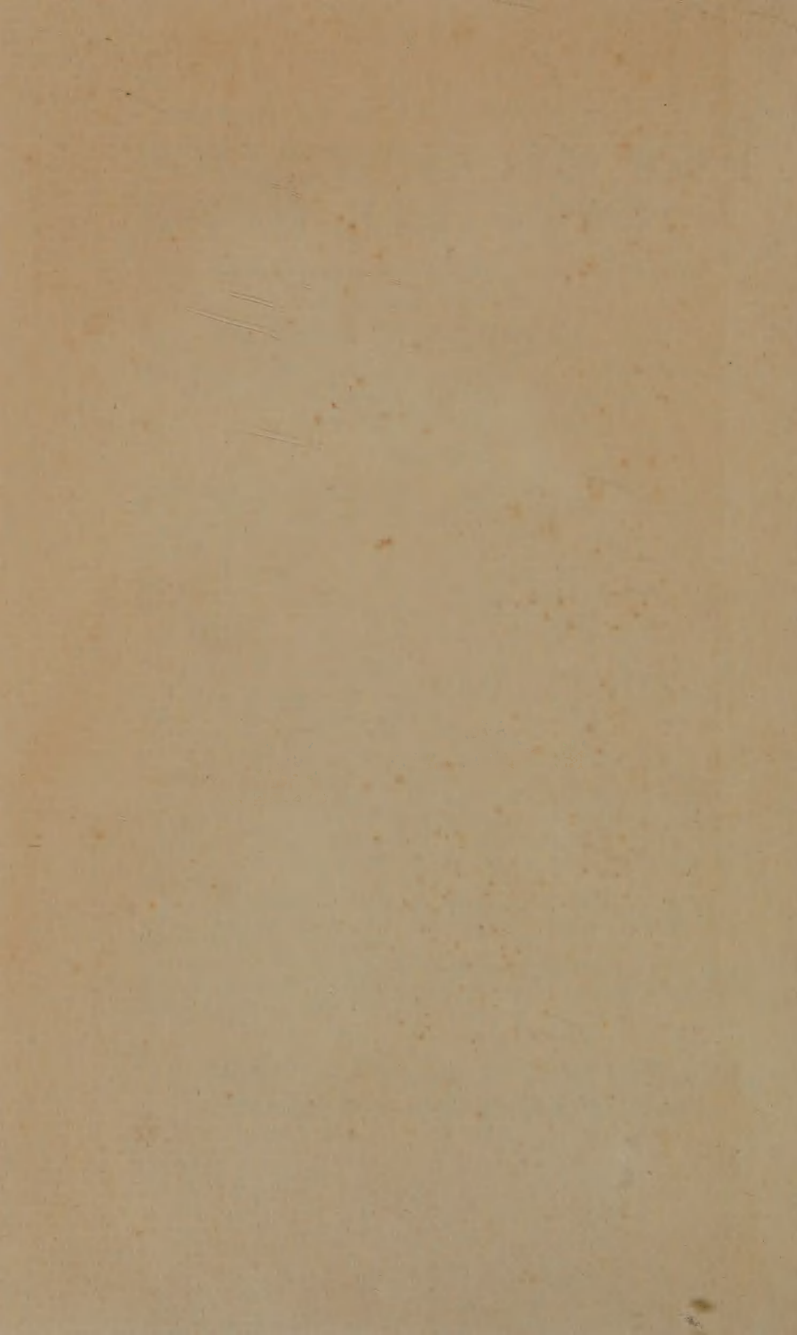
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